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How did they get here, and why do they stay? A phenomenological study of female athletics directors at selected NCAA Division III member institutions

by

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A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

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Ames, Iowa

2010

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DEDICATION

To

Grandma Parrott,
and Grandma and Grandpa Kunkle,
whose earthly journeys ended
while I was in this doctoral program.
I know you are smiling from above.

To

Grandpa Parrott,
who continues to be
one of my biggest fans.
Your strength and encouragement
amaze me.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study focused on the educational, professional, and personal experiences of seven women who currently serve as NCAA Division III athletics directors. While previous literature has examined the experiences of women in Divisions I and II, very little has focused specifically on those in Division III, even though more women serve as athletics directors in this division (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010). Using phenomenology as the methodological roadmap, participants were purposefully selected from Midwestern, small, coeducational, traditional residential colleges, where the quintessential Division III experience exists. Participating athletics directors took part in a series of three semi-structured interviews, which served as the primary data source. Data were analyzed and coded, and then themes were organized into three areas: (1) experiences leading up to the attainment of athletics director positions; (2) experiences related to their current positions; and (3) the convergence of their personal and professional lives.

While the participants typically served as administrators prior to becoming athletics directors, their coaching experiences have been especially vital to their current positions. Their positions require frequent and diverse interactions with others, including those within their athletics departments, various constituencies on campus, and outside their institutions. Unlike previous literature, this study revealed participating Division III female athletics directors have experienced very few gender-related challenges in their careers. The participants care deeply about college athletics, are energized by interactions with student-athletes and coaches, and value the Division III philosophy. Despite the extended and irregular hours their positions require, they try to maintain work/life balance; however, some

are more successful than others. They employ various tactics when balancing the people in their lives with their demanding careers.

The findings of the study have implications for various constituencies, including aspiring and current intercollegiate athletics administrators, coaches, and institution administrators. Recommendations for future research include exploring the experiences of male and female Division III athletics directors, and considering factors such as public and private institutions, men's, women's, and co-educational colleges, geographic regions, and enrollment. Furthermore, continued exploration of work/life balance within the field of intercollegiate athletics would be valuable, specifically the experiences of female administrators, coaches, and other staff.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

In considering the ways in which women's roles in intercollegiate athletics have changed over time, the passage of Title IX and its subsequent impact cannot be overstated. Conflicting opinions about intercollegiate athletics opportunities have resulted from the passage and implementations of Title IX, as the legislation has been both praised and blamed for its impacts on college sports (National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education, 2007). While the enactment of this landmark legislation in 1972 has created numerous opportunities for women to compete in intercollegiate athletics (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010; Lopiano, 2008), the concomitant structural changes of intercollegiate athletics have also decreased the professional leadership opportunities for women administrators (Lapchick, 2009).

Undeniably, Title IX has brought remarkable improvements regarding participation among college female student-athletes, and one cannot underestimate the importance of this legislation. Fewer than 30,000 women, or 15% of the entire student-athlete population, competed in organized intercollegiate athletics when the legislation was passed in 1972 (Lopiano, 2008). With 85% of the student-athlete population represented by men at that time, men's athletics clearly dominated the college sports scene. Participation among women has increased dramatically since the 1970s, with more than 180,000 women competing in all divisions of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) sanctioned athletics in 2010 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010). While men continue to hold a slight edge in national

participation opportunities, women now comprise 43% of the total NCAA student-athlete population (Lopiano, 2008).

Under Title IX, women have been given nearly equal opportunities to compete. These improvements are nothing short of phenomenal, but there is cause for concern regarding the management of intercollegiate athletics departments. The leadership of NCAA athletics is not representative of the student-athlete population, as opportunities for women in athletics administration have declined in the last 35 years (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010).

Unlike the emphasis placed on equitable opportunities for women as participants in intercollegiate athletics, Title IX does not mandate equal opportunities in the administration of athletics. It was the ensuing structural changes in the national governance of athletics that largely impacted the opportunities for women as athletics directors (Grappendorf & Lough, 2006). Chapter two explains the history of women in intercollegiate athletics administration in greater detail and shows how women's roles as athletics administrators have changed in the past 40 years.

The athletics director

The athletics director, or director of athletics, is the highest ranking administrator within an intercollegiate athletics department. While job descriptions may vary among institutions and competitive divisions, this person essentially oversees all aspects of an athletics department's operations. The representation of women serving in these high ranking positions has changed dramatically since the early 1970s. When Title IX was enacted, athletics departments were primarily separated by gender, and 90% of women's departments were managed by women. While participation opportunities were not as

plentiful for women at the time, most women's athletics programs were led by women (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010). Nearly all athletics departments have merged their programs since then (Grappendorf & Lough, 2006), with men largely continuing as athletics directors. Women currently hold 19.3% of all NCAA athletics director positions, so they have not gained much ground in securing these leadership roles. Of 1,051 NCAA member institutions (with women's teams) spanning all three competitive divisions, just 201 are led by women (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010).

The current number of female athletics directors has increased since the mid-1970s, but the percentages vary between NCAA divisions. In Division I, which is the highest level of intercollegiate athletics competition and requires the greatest financial resources (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2007, "Membership requirements"), nine percent of athletics directors are women. Thirty women currently serve in such positions in Division I, a slight increase from 29 women since 2008 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010). In contrast, Divisions II and III have both decreased their proportions of female athletics directors in the last two years. Division II, which is a rung lower than Division I in terms of competition and financial support (NCAA, 2007, "Membership requirements"), currently has 43 female athletics directors, down from 53 in 2008 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010). In Division III, which requires the least amount of funding and centers more on the student-athlete experience (NCAA, 2007, "Membership requirements"), the number of female athletics directors slid from 142 to 110 between 2008 and 2010. Although their numbers decreased in the last two years, Divisions II and III still outmatch their Division I counterparts proportionally, as nearly 15% and 30%, respectively, of athletics director positions are currently held by women (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

Thirty-seven years after Title IX was passed, women are underrepresented as athletics directors in NCAA intercollegiate athletics, as they hold 19.3% of these top level positions across Divisions I, II, and III (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010). This underrepresentation is problematic because women make up over 43% of the entire NCAA student-athlete population; therefore parallel progress for this gender is not present (Lopiano, 2008). However, there is cause for optimism in NCAA Division III, as women have reached these top administrative positions at a greater rate than in other NCAA competitive divisions. Within the Division III membership, which is the largest division in terms of member institutions (NCAA, n.d., Composition), 29.9% of athletics directors are women (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010). This is significant because female student-athletes should be represented by women in the top levels of athletics administration, which is more likely to happen in Division III. Women have progressed considerably in obtaining athletics director positions within this division; however, little is known about the convergence of their professional, educational, and personal experiences.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand the professional, educational, and personal experiences of female athletics directors at selected NCAA Division III member institutions. In this competitive division, women have reached the top level of intercollegiate athletics administration more than in NCAA Divisions I and II (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010), but they are also the least studied. It is important to understand the experiences of these participants, as they have unique circumstances as leaders in a traditionally male dominated field. By

understanding their experiences and privileging their stories, more women may be inspired to obtain leadership positions within intercollegiate athletics and institutional leaders may discover what female athletics directors could mean for their respective athletics departments. Women are underrepresented in athletics director positions, so it is important to learn from their professional, educational, and personal lived experiences to support the next generation in going forward.

Research Questions

The following research question guided the study: What are the professional, educational, and personal experiences of women who serve as athletics directors at selected NCAA Division III member institutions?

More specifically, the researcher desired to answer the following sub-questions:

1. What are the participants' career trajectories?
2. What factors have enabled these women to advance in NCAA Division III athletics administration?
3. What circumstances have presented advantages for the participants?
4. What circumstances have presented challenges for the participants?
5. What background experiences have impacted the participants' careers?
6. What have careers in intercollegiate athletics administration meant for the participants' respective personal lives?

Significance of the Study

The unique professional experiences and career paths of female athletics directors have been documented (Fitzgerald, Sagaria, & Nelson, 1994; Grappendorf, 2001; Lehoullier,

2007; Selby, 2001; Smith, 2005; Teel, 2005) and the roles, characteristics, and professional relationships of mid-level female athletics administrators have been examined as well (Dohrn, 2003; Tiell, 2004; Weaver & Chelladurai, 2002; Yee, 2007). While these studies have expanded the body of knowledge regarding female leaders in these distinctive organizations, they have focused almost exclusively on the professional experiences of women at NCAA Division I and II member institutions.

Although women are more likely to serve as athletics directors at Division III institutions, aside from participation in a few studies, their experiences have not been well documented. In a dissertation that focused on mentoring relationships among NCAA female athletics directors, two of the six participants were from Division III institutions (Lehoullier, 2007). Another dissertation, an investigation of Black female athletic directors' negotiation of their gender, race, and class identities, included one participant (out of 10), from Division III (McDowell, 2008). In addition to the women who participated in these smaller qualitative studies, representatives from Division III have been included as part of larger subject pools in studies that examined female athletics directors' career challenges (Quarterman, DuPree, & Willis, 2006) and rates of advancement (Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obernour, 2002). Male and female athletics administrators from Division III took part in studies to determine the career patterns of NCAA athletics directors (Fitzgerald et al., 1994). This information has helped to gain greater understandings of female athletics directors within the NCAA membership, but little information can be gleaned specific to the in-depth experiences of female athletics directors in Division III.

The lack of research focused on Division III goes beyond female administrators, as there has been little investigation of this competitive division, regardless of the subject area.

As will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 2, the philosophy of NCAA Division III is unique to the association. Compared to Divisions I and II, it has the largest membership and is the only non-scholarship level (NCAA, 2007, “What’s the difference”), while also maintaining the greatest percentage of female athletics directors (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010). Taking these unique characteristics into consideration, more attention regarding the institutional athletics leadership in this competitive division should be paid. Since Division III as a whole has allowed more opportunities for women as athletics directors and the characteristics of this division are unique, it is important to gain a better understanding of the experiences of these individuals. By understanding the experiences of these women, institutional leaders at Division I and II colleges and universities may gain better understandings of why these women have been more successful in obtaining these positions in Division III. Further, the information learned from participants may provide useful information for other women working in intercollegiate athletics administration. What is it about Division III that has allowed women to obtain and maintain athletics director positions? How have the participants’ professional and personal lives converged, and how do they make meaning of their lived experiences?

Audience(s) for the Study

This study is aimed at a number of audiences including, but not limited to, women currently employed in intercollegiate athletics, current athletics directors, college and university Presidents, female student-athletes, and non-athlete college women. The study will be informative for women currently working in intercollegiate athletics, as they may aspire to be athletics directors in the future. They might gain a better understanding of what

it means to be a female intercollegiate athletics director in Division III. Although the study focused solely on female athletics directors at Division III member institutions, the information will be relevant for women who work in various competitive levels of intercollegiate athletics. They may see the circumstances in Division III and become more interested in working at this level or they may choose to focus on others. This research is the first systematic study that focuses specifically on the experiences of female athletics directors in Division III; therefore, it will provide new information to aspiring female athletics administrators within all competitive divisions.

While the study is useful to women considering careers as athletics directors, it will also provide important information to current athletics directors, both male and female. By learning about the experiences of the participants, athletics directors will be able to ascertain how their own experiences have been similar or different from the women in this study. Current athletics directors will learn how the participating women have handled the various roles in their lives, which may help their athletics director colleagues to navigate their unique roles as well. Additionally, athletics directors will gain valuable information about what it means to be an athletics director specifically in NCAA Division III.

This information will also be useful to college and university Presidents and Chancellors, or essentially the persons hiring intercollegiate athletics directors at institutions across the nation. Women are currently underrepresented as athletics directors in the NCAA as a whole, but the numbers are more promising in Division III. By understanding the experiences of the participating women, institutional administrators will gain valuable information about how women could lead their respective athletics departments.

Finally, this study is relevant to college-aged women, both student-athletes and non-athletes. For student-athletes, the information may be useful because they may be interested in gaining employment in intercollegiate athletics administration. Student-athletes often desire to remain involved in athletics once their playing careers end, and their intercollegiate athletics experiences often lead them to this professional field. This study will enable current female student-athletes to understand what their lives may look like if they were to pursue athletics director positions in the future. The study is also relevant for non-athlete college women, because the participants undoubtedly serve as positive role models for all female students on their respective campuses, not just student-athletes. Non-athlete college women may be interested in careers in intercollegiate athletics even though they do not compete in intercollegiate athletics; therefore, the information may be useful to them as well.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework “explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied – the key factors, concepts, or variables – and the presumed relationships among them” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 18). This conceptual framework, located in chapter two, consists of the literature review and theoretical framework. These elements inform the study’s design and provide justification for the research (Maxwell, 2005). By providing a detailed summary and analysis of the related literature and theories that frame the research, the significance of the study is established.

In attempting to understand the experiences of the study’s participating female athletics directors, information specific to Division III athletics, the historical background of women in athletics administration, women in intercollegiate athletics leadership positions,

and women in the workforce are included in the literature review. Theoretically, Spilerman's (1977) career trajectory model and Clark's (2000) work/family border theory were utilized to frame the phenomena being studied. Since this study focused largely on the professional and personal experiences of the participants, these concepts provided an appropriate theoretical framework. In addition to the literature review, career trajectory and work/family border theory are explained in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Overview of Related Literature

In situating the study within the related literature, Chapter 2 provides a summary of the relevant literature. The philosophy of Division III athletics is discussed in greater detail, in order for the readers to understand the unique characteristics of this competitive division within the NCAA governance structure. Since the study's participants are currently employed as athletics directors within Division III, it is important to understand the context of their experiences.

A brief historical overview of women as intercollegiate athletics administrators is an important foundational piece, because paths for women in this profession have been largely impacted by the national governance of intercollegiate athletics. The history of women's athletics under the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) are explored in this section.

Literature specific to women as intercollegiate athletics administrators provides a basis for understanding the research on women in athletics and the findings of previous studies. The literature specific to women as athletics directors, the Senior Woman

Administrator designation (SWA), and challenges confronting female athletics administrators, is examined in this portion of the literature review.

While framing the study within intercollegiate athletics contributes to the body of knowledge within this narrow field, it is important to broaden the scope of the study. To widen the study across disciplines, research focused on women in the workforce is also discussed in the literature review. There is an abundance of scholarly literature on professional women and “the glass ceiling.” This section of Chapter 2 provides a glimpse of information related to professional women, because women in athletics administration may have similar experiences to those in the workforce.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework serves to structure the research through “concepts and previous research that inform the phenomenon being studied” (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006, p. 16). As part of the conceptual framework, the theoretical framework integrates theory to the study. Credible qualitative inquiry typically includes related theory and/or models, which serve as lenses through which the researcher views the study. This study incorporated Spilerman’s (1977) career trajectory model and Clark’s (2000) work/family border theory. Career trajectory was used to gain a better understanding of the participants’ career paths. Work/family border theory helped to explain how the participants’ family and personal lives have impacted their professional experiences and vice versa. Chapter 2 provides greater description of career trajectory and work/family border theory.

Summary of Research Approach and Design

“Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). In order to fully understand the lived professional, educational, and personal experiences of female athletics directors in Division III, this study utilizes a qualitative research design. Various elements comprise a qualitative research design and all must work in cohesion.

Constructivism is the epistemological foundation (Crotty, 1998) of the study, because the meanings of the participants’ life experiences were constructed between the participant and researcher. A basic interpretive theoretical perspective (Prasad, 2005) was applied because my interpretations, as the researcher, helped to explain the participants’ experiences. The study was methodologically guided by phenomenology. This is an appropriate methodological choice because the purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of the participants, as phenomenology seeks to focus the participants’ lived experiences to a central meaning, or “essence” (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology served as the roadmap throughout the study, guiding many facets of the research process.

Data were collected from a “purposefully selected” (Creswell, 2009, p. 179) group of women who serve as Division III athletics directors in the Midwest region. In-depth interviews are the most common method used in phenomenological research (Creswell, 1998), and provided the most significant portion of data for this study. In addition to a series of three interviews with each participant (Seidman, 2006), document analysis provided context and supplemented the interview data. The analysis of various types of data from diverse sources created rich descriptions of the participants’ educational, professional, and

personal experiences. Chapter 3 provides a more thorough description of the research elements and design.

Researcher Positionality

I came to this study with a vested interest in the topic, as I was a Division III student-athlete and have been employed in intercollegiate athletics my entire professional life. My career in intercollegiate athletics has enabled me to gain experiences in various fields of intercollegiate athletics, including sports information, compliance, event management, academic services, and coaching. As a woman and an aspiring athletics administrator, this topic is of great personal interest as I continue my career. Some aspects of my career path may align well with those of the participants, although I am unsure if I will desire to be an athletics director in the future. I am a former Division III student-athlete and believe deeply in the philosophy behind this competitive division. While I am currently employed at a Division I institution, I can see myself returning to Division III as my career progresses. As a former Division III student-athlete and a woman, I am pleased that Division III has led the way regarding women obtaining athletics director positions.

While I am very much interested in the educational and professional experiences of these women, I am also fascinated by the ways their personal lives have been impacted by their careers in athletics, and vice versa. I know women who have exited intercollegiate athletics or significantly altered their career goals within the field, largely because of the strain this profession places on family life. While I do not have a family at the present time, someday I hope to follow this path. Nevertheless, I am interested in understanding how these women balance their professional and personal lives, in attempting to “have it all.” It is

important to disclose this information, as I have a very real interest in this topic in both my professional and personal life.

I desire to understand the experiences of these women and I am confident this research will contribute to the body of scholarly research. The women who serve as athletics directors in Division III have stories to tell, but their experiences have been underrepresented in the literature. I enjoyed bringing their experiences and perspectives to light in this unique profession.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were defined for use in this research:

Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW): The governing body for women's intercollegiate athletics from 1971 to 1982. The AIAW was established in 1971 with 280 member institutions, and grew to 971 members at its peak in the early 1980s (Hawes, 1999). The association aimed to govern itself differently than men's athletics, as evidenced in the prohibition of athletics scholarships and off-campus recruiting for many of its years. A unique governance structure provided all teams the opportunity to participate in post-season play, through state, regional, and national competitions. The organization began as an educational association, as athletics departments were closely tied to their institutional physical education departments (McKindra, 2007). The association sponsored 41 national championships for women in 19 sports, and eventually gained a national audience by signing television contract with NBC. The AIAW ceased operations in 1982, one year after the NCAA began sponsoring participation opportunities for women (Hawes, 1999).

Athletics Director: An intercollegiate athletics director is the chief executive officer of a college or university's athletics department. The roles and responsibilities of athletics

directors vary among divisions, because the objectives and philosophies differ between Divisions I, II, and III (Wong, 2009). Regardless of the competitive level, athletics directors must have the knowledge and management capacity to oversee all operations within his or her athletics department. Athletics administration staffs can vary in size among institutions; therefore, the responsibilities of athletics directors can fluctuate. Athletics departments tend to be larger in Division I; therefore, athletics directors at this level serve as managers for large organizations that function much like corporate businesses (Single, 1989). In Division III, athletics directors typically oversee smaller athletics operations, as these departments do not generate revenue. It is common for Division III athletics directors to hold faculty positions or serve in dual roles at their respective institutions (Morris, 2009). Essentially, athletics directors oversee all aspects of his or her institutional athletics department's operations.

Division I: The highest level of NCAA intercollegiate athletics, which requires the greatest financial resources (Wong, 2009). As noted in the Division I philosophy statement, these institutions sponsor “at the highest feasible level of intercollegiate competition one or both of the traditional spectator-oriented, income-producing sports of football and basketball,” while aiming for “regional and national excellence and prominence” (NCAA academic & membership affairs, 2009, p. 308). Member institutions must sponsor at least seven sports for men and seven for women, or six for men and eight for women. Division I schools must provide minimum athletics financial aid awards, and there are maximum financial aid awards that cannot be exceeded. Institutions must meet contest and participant minimums for each sport, as well as meet scheduling criteria (NCAA, 2007, “Membership requirements”). There are currently 336 Division I member institutions (NCAA, n.d.,” Composition”).

Division II: The middle level of NCAA intercollegiate athletics, in which athletics departments are funded like other departments within the institution (Wong, 2009). As stated in the division's philosophy, "the Division II approach provides growth opportunities through academic achievement, learning in high-level athletics competition and development of positive societal attitudes in service to community" (NCAA, 2009, "Division II facts"). Member institutions must sponsor at least five sports for men and five for women, or four for men and six for women. Like Division I, there are contest and participation minimums for each sport, as well as scheduling requirements for football and basketball. While student-athletes may be provided financial aid awards, there are no minimums as there are in Division I. However, there are maximum amounts that cannot be exceeded. While national championships are sponsored each season, most regular season contests are played regionally (NCAA, 2007, "Membership requirements"). There are currently 293 Division II member institutions (NCAA, 2009, "Division II facts").

Division III: The defining characteristic of this competitive division is that, unlike Division I and II, member institutions cannot provide athletically related financial aid to student-athletes (Wong, 2009). Division III institutions "place highest priority on the overall quality of the educational experience and on the successful completion of all students' academic programs," while emphasizing the "impact of athletics on the participants rather than on the spectators" (NCAA, n.d., "Division III philosophy"). Member institutions must sponsor at least five sports for men and five for women. Like Division I and II, there are contest and participant minimums for each sport, but there are no scheduling requirements. Like Division II, athletics departments are funded much like other departments within the institution and regular season competition is primarily played regionally (NCAA, 2007,

“Membership requirements”). The largest of the NCAA’s divisions, there are currently 447 member institutions in Division III (NCAA, 2009, “Division III facts”).

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA): A nonprofit organization charged with governing college and university athletics programs in the United States. With over 1,000 member institutions, the NCAA is the largest collegiate athletics organization in the world. In order to address the needs and desires of the various member institutions, the association is divided into three competitive levels, Division I, II, and III. The NCAA’s national headquarters is located in Indianapolis, Indiana, where 350 staff members facilitate the operations of this organization (Wong, 2009). Each year, over 400,000 student-athletes compete in 23 sports that are sponsored by the NCAA (NCAA academic & membership affairs, 2009).

Senior Woman Administrator (SWA): “The highest ranking female involved in the management of an institutions’ intercollegiate athletics program” (NCAA academic & membership affairs, 2009, p. 18). There has been a great deal of confusion about this position; it is not a job title, but rather a designation “intended to encourage and promote the involvement of female administrators in meaningful ways” (NCAA, n.d., “SWA”). Women who hold this designation should ideally play significant roles in the decision-making and management of their respective athletics departments. With the exception of men’s colleges, every NCAA member institution is required to have a woman designated as the SWA.

Title IX: The landmark legislation passed in 1972, as part of the Education Amendments to the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prompted dramatic changes in women’s intercollegiate athletics. It reads, in part: “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination

under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (U.S. Department of Labor, n.d.) Although athletics were not mentioned specifically in the legislation, they are considered an integral part of education and, therefore, are covered by this law (National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education, 2007). Less than 30,000 women participated in college athletics when Title IX passed (Lopiano, 2008). Since its passage, intercollegiate athletics opportunities for women have grown dramatically, with over 180,000 women participating in NCAA athletics in 2008 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010).

Summary

This qualitative study focused on the educational, professional, and personal experiences of women who serve as athletics directors in NCAA Division III intercollegiate athletics. In this competitive division, which has a unique set of characteristics (NCAA, 2007, “What’s the difference”), women have progressed to athletics director positions at a much greater rate than in other NCAA competitive divisions (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010). Despite this growth in representation of women as athletics directors within Division III, very little research has studied the backgrounds, career paths, and personal experiences of these women.

The dissertation is comprised of five chapters: introduction, review of literature, methods, results, and discussion. Chapter 2 provides an in-depth description of literature that conceptually frames the study. Understanding the relevant literature situates this study within the body of existing research. Chapter 2 examines literature related to Division III athletics, the history of women in intercollegiate athletics, women as athletics administrators, barriers women often face in athletics administration, and women in the workforce. Chapter

3 describes the research design, which is the specific plan for conducting the study from start to finish. The epistemological foundation, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods are explained in greater detail in this chapter. Chapter 4 provides profiles of each of the study's participants and describes the emergent themes found in the data. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the broader scope of the study's results and provides recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review serves to situate the study, by highlighting the existing literature related to the topic. Division III intercollegiate athletics are discussed in detail, in order for the audience to understand the unique characteristics of this competitive division within the NCAA governance structure. Since the study's participants are currently employed as athletics directors within Division III, it is important to understand the context of their experiences.

A brief historical overview of women as intercollegiate athletics administrators is an important foundational piece as paths for women in this profession have been largely impacted by the national governance of intercollegiate athletics, particularly since the passage of Title IX in 1972. The history of women's athletics under the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is explored in this section.

Literature specific to women as intercollegiate athletics administrators provides a basis for understanding women in athletics and what previous studies have determined. The literature examined in this section is specific to women as athletics directors, the Senior Woman Administrator designation (SWA), and challenges confronting female athletics administrators.

The research focused on women in the workforce is discussed in this literature review to widen the scope of this study across disciplines. There is an abundance of scholarly literature related to working women; this portion of Chapter 2 provides a brief glimpse of

relevant information that helps to frame the study beyond the narrow field of intercollegiate athletics.

Finally, the theoretical framework of Spilerman's (1977) career trajectory model and Clark's (2000) work/family border theory are described in this chapter. Through analysis of the data, it was determined that these are appropriate lenses for the study. Career trajectory is used to better understand the participants' career paths. Work/family border theory helps explain how the participants' family and personal lives have impacted their professional experiences and vice versa.

Division III

When studying the experiences of female athletics directors within NCAA Division III, it is important to provide the context of this competitive division. To understand the participants' experiences and their roles as athletics directors, it is necessary to comprehend Division III and its unique characteristics, because there are significant distinctions between the three NCAA divisions (NCAA, 2007, "What's the difference"). Since Division III attracts less attention from fans, news media (Naughton, 1997), and scholarly researchers, there are often misconceptions about this division and what its member institutions value in intercollegiate athletics. According to the Division III philosophy statement:

Colleges and universities in NCAA Division III place highest priority on the overall quality of the educational experience and on the successful completion of all students' academic programs. They seek to establish and maintain an environment in which a student-athlete's athletics activities are conducted as an integral part of the student-athlete's educational experience. They also seek to establish and maintain an environment that values cultural diversity and gender equity among their student-athletes and athletics staff. (NCAA, n.d., "Division III philosophy")

Division III was created and the first championships were held for men in 1973, when the three-division format replaced the former University and College Division structure that began in 1957 (NCAA, 2009, “Division III governance”). The initial championships for women were held in 1981, when the NCAA first offered athletics for women (Crowley, 2006). The Division III philosophy statement, which distinguishes this division from its peers in Divisions I and II, was written and adopted in 1983 (NCAA, 2009, “Division III governance”).

Division III membership has grown considerably in the last 20 years, with 120 new members joining since 1990 (NCAA, 2009, “Division III governance”). The largest NCAA division by far, there are currently 447 total members, 432 with active status and 15 provisional. Of the NCAA’s 418,000 student-athletes competing each academic year, 39%, or 163,000, compete in Division III (NCAA, 2009, “Division III facts”). The division is expected to grow to 464 members by 2016, with the potential for 480 members by 2020 (NCAA, 2009, “Division III governance”).

As membership has grown, there have been discussions and debates about maintaining the division’s philosophy while serving the needs of a diverse group of colleges and universities (NCAA, 2009, “Division III governance”). Although 80% of Division III member institutions are private, with an enrollment average of 2,248 (NCAA, 2009, “Division III facts”), there is a wide range of sizes and types of institutions within the division. There are small liberal arts colleges with enrollments under 1,000 students, mid-sized research institutions, and large public universities (Suggs, 2003).

Division III operating budgets continue to pale in comparison to Division I and II. Institutions with football typically spend just under \$2,500,000 per year, while non-football

programs expend approximately \$1,800,000 (NCAA, 2009, “Division III facts”). With the focus on student-athletes rather than on generating funds, all Division III athletics departments lose money each year (Bennett, 2007; Naughton, 1997). Since Division III athletics do not generate revenue for the NCAA with television agreements and corporate sponsorships, like their colleagues in Division I, little money is put back into Division III. During the 2009-2010 academic year, 3.18%, or \$22,580,000, of the NCAA’s revenue was spent on Division III (NCAA, 2009, “Division III facts”).

While the defining characteristic of Division III is the disallowance of athletically related financial aid, its philosophy is often misunderstood by the general population. Since Division III athletics strive to impact the experiences of student-athletes rather than spectators (Naughton, 1997), the identity is often unclear. Athletics are intended to be extracurricular activities (Bennett, 2007), and student-athletes are to be treated like the rest of the student body (Naughton, 1997). Considering the misinformation regarding this division and its characteristics, the lack of image is currently being addressed by the membership. There is an initiative underway to increase the awareness of Division III and its distinctiveness:

Our division is the NCAA's largest, with a strong and unique philosophy. Yet we are more known more for what we DON'T do (award athletics aid) than what we stand for. It is better to identify what you stand FOR than what you oppose. As the division continues to grow, it is important to identify and communicate our shared values. (NCAA, 2009, “Division III governance,” p. 113)

This initiative is largely being driven by the membership because concern has been voiced regarding the varying approaches to athletics within Division III. Considering the large membership, diverse institutions, and different philosophies towards athletics, it is

challenging to meet the needs of all members. Debates continue regarding current hot topics in Division III, such as redshirting, non-traditional playing seasons (Bennett, 2007), the “arms race,” length of playing seasons, academic underperformance, admissions decisions, and financial aid awards. Some perceive there is a growing divide between athletics departments and main campus operations (Tobin, 2005). Former Hamilton College President, Eugene Tobin, confirmed a trickle-down effect of Division I athletics and its impact on Division III by stating, “What happens in high-profile sports eventually affects lower-profile sports” (p. 25).

A group of Division III presidents and administrators have voiced their concern for the division’s future, in light of incongruence among the membership, and have recommended a divisional separation. According to Douglas Bennett, President of Earlham College, “There are essentially two approaches, both legitimate, but so incompatible that one division should not try to embrace them both” (2007, p. B12). The potential split of Division III has been discussed since the early 2000s, but a vote by the membership in 2008 strongly indicated a desire to keep the current structure in place. Although the membership voted to keep Division III intact, the initiative to raise awareness was supported and is currently in progress (NCAA, 2009, “Division III governance”). “A comprehensive effort to define and promote the Division III identity has been initiated” and seeks to “emphasize the division’s holistic education approach and the integration of athletics into the educational experience” (p. 122).

This contextual information about Division III athletics is valuable, because the unique characteristics of this division likely impact the experiences of the women who participated in the study. In order to realize the professional, educational, and personal

experiences of female athletics directors in Division III, one must understand various aspects of the Division III philosophy and its member institutions. As a whole, this division attracts less attention from fans and news media (Naughton, 1997) so misconceptions often exist among the general public. Providing this information allows readers to realize the values of Division III intercollegiate athletics, as a basis for gaining greater understanding of the participating athletics directors.

History of Women in Athletics Administration

When studying the experiences of women who currently serve as athletics directors in NCAA Division III, it is important to trace the history of women who serve as intercollegiate athletics administrators. Intercollegiate athletics, particularly for women, have changed dramatically since the passage of Title IX in 1972 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010; Lopiano, 2008). In order to set the stage for understanding the experiences of women who currently serve as athletics directors in NCAA Division III, it is valuable to realize the history of women in the profession.

In the past 40 years, there has been a dramatic shift in the management of NCAA athletics departments. When organized women's intercollegiate athletics began in the 1960s, they were governed by women (Wushanley, 2004). While Title IX has brought impressive change related to female student-athletes' participation in intercollegiate athletics, an unintentional consequence has resulted in fewer opportunities for women as athletics directors. Currently, women are underrepresented as athletics directors in all three NCAA divisions (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010). The following brief historical summary reveals how

women's representation as intercollegiate athletics administrators has changed dramatically over the past 40 years.

Although women's college athletics are thriving today, the history of highly structured women's intercollegiate athletics began only a few decades ago. Female college students have participated in intramurals and other informal athletic activities on college campuses since the early 1900s (Wushanley, 2004). However, in the 1960s, it became clear that a national governing body for women's college athletics was necessary. Women across the country participated in sports more than ever during this time, and desired to have their own national governing body (Hultstrand, 1993).

This first national governing body for women's athletics, the Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (CIAW), was established in 1966 by women physical educators. With intention of keeping "women's sports within the boundaries of women's philosophy and under women's control" (Wushanley, 2004, p. 16), this commission set standards, promoted growth at the local, state, and regional levels, and sponsored national championships in seven sports. Realizing their inability to keep pace with the increased demands for national governance, the same women physical educators in the CIAW eventually established an association of institutional members to take over the commission's operations (Wushanley, 2004). In 1971, the CIAW became the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW), whose official operations began in 1972. The association, which was managed entirely by women, sponsored women's competitions and championships through the 1970s and into the 1980s. During this time, the greatest landmark in women's athletics, the passage of Title IX, occurred in 1972 (Grappendorf & Lough, 2006).

According to Acosta and Carpenter (2010), in this early era of women's college athletics, over 90% of athletics directors were female. The majority of these administrators had roots in physical education, and many continued to teach courses at their respective colleges during this time. Several of these women had coaching backgrounds, and most remained as coaches while serving as athletics directors. During this time, the playing seasons were much shorter, the recruiting demands were minimal, and there was little emphasis on women's sports. In fact, many coaches were volunteers (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010).

In 1980, the NCAA began sponsoring sports for women and, in 1981, the first NCAA women's championships were held (NCAA, n.d., "Historical"). The AIAW could not compete with the power, money, and prestige of the NCAA, and ceased operations in 1982 (Hultstrand, 1993; Parkhouse, 1990). When the AIAW folded and women's athletics joined the NCAA, most athletics departments merged their men's and women's programs as well. In nearly all of these combined departments, the athletics director for the men's department became the athletics director of the entire athletics department at that institution. Many of the former women's athletics directors became assistant or associate athletics directors, and were given the designation of Primary Woman Administrator (PWA). The PWA designation began in 1981, and was later renamed Senior Woman Administrator (SWA) in 1989 (Sweet, 2006).

Since the NCAA took control over women's sports in 1982, women have faced an uphill battle in regaining athletics director positions. While some progress has been made (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010), women who aspire to work in these positions continue to have a challenging road ahead. The merging of men's and women's programs has provided benefits

for female student-athletes, but it has also created great barriers for women who aspire to become athletics directors (Uhlir, 1987, as cited in Grappendorf & Lough, 2006).

This historical overview of women as athletics administrators provides important contextual information for the study, as the role of women has changed dramatically in this professional field since the 1970's (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010; Lopiano, 2008). Women continue to be underrepresented as NCAA athletics directors, but substantial growth has occurred in Division III, with nearly one-third of athletics directors being women in 2010 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010). Realizing the history of women in athletics provides valuable contextual information for this study, and helps set the stage for understanding what it means to be female athletics directors in NCAA Division III.

Women as Athletics Directors

As discussed in the previous chapter, the percentage of women serving as athletics directors has changed dramatically since the passage of Title IX. While participation opportunities for female student-athletes have increased considerably as a result of this legislation, an unintended consequence has been the significant decline of women as intercollegiate athletics directors. Acosta and Carpenter (2010) noted that, when Title IX passed in 1972, 90% of women's athletics departments were administrated by women. Currently, in 2010, women hold approximately 19% of all NCAA athletics director positions. Although the percentage of female athletics directors has improved since the mid-1970s; however, the percentages vary between divisions. In Division I, only 9% of athletics director positions are held by women, a slight increase from 8% in 2008. Divisions II and III have both decreased the number of female athletics directors in recent years, although their

percentages continue to exceed those in Division I. The percentage of female athletics directors in Division II currently stands at nearly 15%, down from 19% in 2008. Division III clearly leads the way, with roughly 30% of its athletics director positions held by women; a four percentage point decrease from 34% in the previous reporting period.

The literature related to female athletics directors has primarily focused on those within NCAA Division I and II, even though women are represented more so in Division III. Although this study focuses on women in Division III, it is important to understand the literature encompassing female athletics directors, regardless of their institutional membership levels.

Demographics

In studies that included demographic information for participants, female athletics directors in Division I and II were typically Caucasian and ranged in age from 46-55. Approximately half of the participants were married or living with a partner/spouse, and had zero to one children (Grappendorf, 2001; Selby, 2001; Teel, 2005). Discussed later in this chapter, the literature has indicated that time demands of athletics administration have made it challenging for women to have family lives. This demographic information is important to the study, because the demographic information of females in Division III is unknown. As mentioned previously, there are many more female athletics directors in Division III than other competitive divisions; however, prior to this study, their demographic information had not been discovered.

Formal education

Previous literature has revealed that female athletics directors typically earn graduate degrees. Studies have indicated that the overwhelming majority of female athletics directors (who have participated in studies) obtained master's degrees and several earned doctoral degrees (Grappendorf, 2001; Quarterman, DuPree, & Willis, 2006; Selby, 2001; Teel, 2005). The literature is clear that women face various barriers while pursuing athletics director positions, so it has been found beneficial for them to prepare with as much formal education as possible. Women are underrepresented as athletics directors and face scrutiny as a result, so many have advanced degrees and gain broad-based experiences in athletics, in order to be considered for these high-ranking positions (Teel, 2005).

Career patterns

Depending on their age and the amount of athletics opportunities available in their childhood and high school days, female athletics directors likely participated in athletics in their adolescence, high school, and college years (Grappendorf, 2001; Selby, 2001; Teel, 2005). Women at Division I institutions generally competed in Division I or AIAW University level athletics, while those from Division II schools competed in various levels of AIAW and NCAA competition (Teel, 2005).

Their previous employment experiences were varied; coach, teacher, associate/assistant athletics director, and SWA were among the most typical responses (Selby, 2001; Teel, 2005). For many, their first positions in athletics administration were in internal operations, such as special events or facility management. Considerable time was spent as senior level administrators before gaining athletics director positions. Some spent

most of their professional careers at one or two schools (Selby, 2001), while others moved around in order to advance professionally (Grappendorf & Lough, 2006). Women have typically held between five and seven positions prior to landing employment as athletics directors. In seeking the position of athletics director, participants not only reported they enjoyed athletics tremendously, but they also had career aspirations of leading others (Grappendorf, 2001).

It is important to understand the typical career patterns of female athletics directors, as they may be similar or different to those who participated in this study. As mentioned previously, since there are considerably more women who serve as athletics directors in Division III, their career patterns could fluctuate. Spilerman's (1977) career trajectory helps explain the career patterns of female Division III athletics directors who participated in the study.

Professional experiences

In a qualitative study of female athletics directors in NCAA Division I, Selby (2001) revealed that the professional experiences were varied and extensive, typically requiring 60 to 80 hours of work per week. Relationships with institutional administration, coaches, athletics department staff, and boosters were important and crucial to success. Although participants desired more frequent interactions with student-athletes, those opportunities did not occur often. Important requirements for the position of athletics director included working knowledge of all areas in athletics, particularly external affairs. Other requirements included organizational and time management skills, financial background, the ability to fundraise, and knowledge of football operations. Female athletics directors must be willing

to work hard and take risks in their career paths. When indicating the most important factors sought for athletics director positions, participants responded that leadership style, intelligence, and education were the most valuable characteristics. Since the characteristics and philosophy of Division I and III are very different, the professional experiences of female athletics directors in the current study may or may not coincide with those revealed by Selby (2001).

Mentoring

In a study of the role of mentoring in the lives of female athletics directors, Lehoullier (2007) found that strong mentor/mentee relationships provided professional advantages for participants. Of the mentors who impacted the professional lives of the participants, the majority were women. Parents, teachers, high school and college coaches, male and female colleagues, and supervisors were mentioned as significant characters in the participants' lives. When identifying the primary mentor for each participant, half of participating athletics directors identified women while half recognized men. Although men were identified as half of the primary mentors, those who identified female mentors indicated deeper and more supportive relationships with their mentors. All participants indicated that mentoring relationships were important factors in their ascension to athletics director positions.

In a similar study, Teel (2005) also found mentoring to be an important aspect of professional development for female athletics directors. Participants were most often mentored by *both* men and women, and their mentors served as strong role models. Seeing the fruits of their mentoring relationships, participating athletics directors reported that they

were currently mentoring other women in the profession. Women indicated receiving professional support from female and colleagues at their respective institutions, as well as from peers at other NCAA institutions, and their professional organizations too. In Selby's (2001) qualitative study of female Division I athletics directors, mentoring relationships existed, but primarily with men in the profession. Female mentors were very supportive, but the male mentors had the greatest impact on the participants' careers.

A goal of the current study was to ascertain how mentoring has impacted the professional development of women who participated in the study. Since there are more female athletics directors in Division III, participants may have had more mentoring relationships with other women, rather than men.

The wrong track

Some feel that in order to be an athletics director, especially in Division I, potential candidates should have experience in the oversight of football and men's basketball, the revenue-generating sports on most campuses. It is difficult for women to be given these opportunities and, without experience in these sports, it is hard to be legitimately considered for athletics director openings. In addition to the oversight of revenue sports, athletics director candidates need experience in marketing, fund raising, and business affairs, which women face challenges to obtain. Instead, women tend to land jobs in compliance, academic advising, or life-skills development, which seldom lead toward careers as athletics directors (Suggs, 2005). Participants in Selby's research (2001) indicated that women often work in internal affairs, and then are unable to transition to external affairs and gain essential

experience in fundraising, donor relations, and marketing. Thus, women tend to be relegated to internal operations.

The literature related to career paths was largely based on female athletics directors in Division I; therefore, it is valuable to determine if this pigeonholing occurs in Division III. If there is an appropriate track toward obtaining athletics director positions in Division III, it appears that more women have attained it, since their representation is higher in this division than Division I and II. Experience in the financial areas of athletics have been considered part of an appropriate track for Division I; however, since less focus is on generating revenue in Division III, the information may be similar or different. Additional information on barriers women face as athletics directors can be found later in this chapter.

The Senior Woman Administrator

It is important to provide contextual information related to the Senior Woman Administrator (SWA) designation. The Senior Woman Administrator designation originated when the AIAW and NCAA merged, and was then known as the Primary Woman Administrator (Sweet, 2006). The role of this position has often been interpreted inappropriately by NCAA's membership. The definition is provided as follows:

The Senior Woman Administrator (SWA) is the highest ranking female in each NCAA athletic department or member conference. The designation of SWA is intended to encourage and promote the involvement of female administrators in meaningful ways in the decision-making process in intercollegiate athletics. The designation is intended to enhance representation of female experience and perspective at the institutional, conference and national levels and support women's interests. Her daily responsibilities can include any department tasks and must include senior management team responsibilities. (NCAA, n.d., SWA)

Since its inception, there has been great confusion and ambiguity regarding the role of the woman designated as SWA. There is little consistency regarding job responsibilities and level of power within their respective departments (Dohrn, 2003). One common misconception is that SWA stands for “Senior Women’s Administrator,” and this person oversees the women’s teams. In reality, the position is different at each school, since it is a designation and an additional aspect of her job. This leads to another misunderstanding that SWA is the person’s job title, when again, it is a designated role. Some administrators have completely misunderstood its meaning, and have filled the role with men (Sweet, 2006). When the NCAA released its most recent gender statistics in 2006, nearly five percent of Division I SWA positions were filled by men. In 1996, less than one percent of Division I SWA positions were held by men, but somehow they have gained a significant number of these positions in the past 10 years. Division III made great progress during that time, as nearly seven percent of SWA posts were held by men in 1996, but in 2006 that number dropped to one percent (DeHass, 2007).

According to former NCAA President and current NCAA consultant Judith Sweet (2006), the SWA should be involved in the management of the athletics department, and is ideally an assistant/associate athletics director and part of the department’s senior management team. Some athletics directors designate an existing female in the department as SWA even though she may not be the best person for the position. According to Sweet, the SWA must appreciate and represent female student-athletes, and many times the highest ranking female does not understand this important role. For example, the director of business operations could be the highest-ranking female in the department, but her experiences may not have prepared her to serve as an advocate for these women (Dohrn, 2003). At many

Division II and III institutions, the designated SWA is a coach. This occurs because athletics departments at these levels are generally smaller, and employees wear several hats.

Designating a coach as SWA is acceptable, provided she is involved in the management of the department. Furthermore, an institution with a female athletics director may designate another female administrator as the SWA (Sweet, 2006).

The SWA is, and will continue to be, a priority for the NCAA. The SWA should have “program-wide administrative responsibilities, including decision-making at the institutional, conference, and national levels” (Sweet, 2006) and should represent and support women’s issues in intercollegiate athletics. While the SWA plays an important role in gender equity and Title IX issues, the NCAA stresses that the SWA should not be the only department member who deals with these matters. The enforcement of Title IX and other gender initiatives should be a collaborative effort by many (Sweet).

Strong athletics director/SWA partnerships are crucial in college athletics, and there are various methods for developing such cohesion. First, an important role for the SWA is to be an expert on Title IX issues. Hopefully, she is not the only department administrator concerned with gender equity matters, but the SWA can be the authority. No department wants to face Title IX complaints; therefore, an SWA capable of preventing and solving these issues is invaluable. If she is involved in the management of the department, she will recognize dilemmas before they arise. Additionally, Dohrn noted that “diversity equals strength” (2006, p. 1); therefore, athletics directors should encourage SWAs to speak up and bring additional perspectives to the table. At most institutions, roughly half of the student-athletes are women; therefore, a female voice should be involved in the decision-making process (Dohrn, 2006).

Strong athletics director/SWA partnerships can exist only in environments that are inviting. Athletics directors must realize that Title IX and gender equity concerns are departmental issues, and not merely particulars of concern to the SWA. A large frustration by many SWAs is the “lip service given to gender equity” (Dohrn, 2006, p. 2) by athletics directors and other institutional officials. It is important that each athletics director support his or her SWA regarding gender equity issues; otherwise, her voice will be lost and progress will slow. In addition to her role regarding women’s issues, it is imperative that the SWA is involved in the decisions made by the senior administrative staff. She should be involved in strategic planning, and have oversight of certain areas of the department (Dohrn).

Dohrn (2006) also emphasized the importance of mentoring SWAs effectively. Athletics directors should provide SWAs with opportunities for growth within the department and campus as well as nationally. In the department, she should be allowed to partake in areas that may not fall under her job description, like football operations or donor relations. On campus, she can make contacts with important campus administrators and serve on committees, as well as develop a strong relationship with the faculty athletics representative. These contacts with campus officials are imperative, both to the department and the SWA as her career progresses (Dohrn, 2003). Nationally, experience running championship events and placement on NCAA committees will give her valuable knowledge; therefore, athletics directors should help her obtain such roles. Because a great deal of networking commences during time spent on committees and running events, SWAs can benefit personally from these experiences as well (Dohrn, 2006).

Dohrn (2006) stressed that, above all, the importance of exemplary communication and trust between the athletics director and SWA cannot be emphasized enough. Ideally,

these individuals work hand-in-hand on a daily basis, and have a cohesive relationship in doing so. The development and maintenance of this relationship is a two-way street; and, even though some issues are emotionally charged, both parties should play their role effectively. The athletics director must listen and give the SWA a viable voice in the department. In addition, the SWA must communicate in a non-threatening manner, even though it can be challenging because of the passion that often accompanies gender equity issues. Dohrn (2003, 2006) suggests that if a strong relationship exists between the athletics director and SWA, the entire department will benefit greatly. In her doctoral dissertation, she stated:

If the SWA has no direct line to the athletic director and is not current in the daily happenings of the department, it does not matter what her title is or what her written or announced responsibilities are. The constituents are going to know they cannot go to her for help because they knew her hands are tied. (2003, p. 61)

Since the SWA designation was created, the limited scholarly research on these women has primarily focused on the career paths (Dohrn, 2003; Tiell, 2004), development (Yates, 2007), power struggles (Dohrn, 2003), and roles and tasks (Tiell, 2004) of these women in Division I and II. While the role of the SWA is different from the athletics director, there is relevant information for both groups of these women.

Career paths

In a study of participants who held SWA positions at Division II institutions, Tiell (2004) revealed that the majority of participants followed a similar career path, in which formal education, athletics internships or graduate assistantships, coaching experience, and mentoring with others in the field, were important steps. Participants were typically

promoted to the SWA position after serving at the institution for one to four years in a wide variety of positions. While holding the designation of SWA, women also held various titles, although many were not at the administrative level of assistant, associate, or senior association athletics director (Tiell, 2004). In planning for careers as SWAs, participants in Dohrn's (2003) research stressed the importance of formal education, financial experience, networking opportunities, diverse athletics experiences including coaching, revenue sports, and career planning and mobility.

Power

In a study by Tiell (2004), SWAs indicated they did not have a strong role in the decision-making and management of their athletics departments. They also did not have considerable roles regarding women's issues within their departments. Rather than spending their time making decisions related to the management of their departments, participants reportedly spent most of their time on program supervision, financial operations, hiring and training of staff, increasing revenue, and public relations. Although, according to the NCAA, the designated SWA is to have decision-making and management responsibilities, those participating in Tiell's study did not feel as though they were part of such conversations.

Ambiguity of power was also apparent in Dohrn's (2003) qualitative study of SWAs in Division I. There was little consistency in the titles and responsibilities of the participants. The NCAA has indicated that SWAs should be part of their departmental decision-making, but there is little consistency of this practice across the board. Some participants indicated a sense of power while others felt a sense of tokenism in the designation. There was consensus that the SWA should be an administrator rather than simply "the highest ranking" woman as

defined by the NCAA. For women who are not part of the administrative structure, they often feel a lack of authority to perform the duties as necessary.

Although the positions of athletics director and Senior Woman Administrator are different, the literature on SWAs is valuable because women in each of these roles are high-ranking officials in intercollegiate athletics departments. Since there are significantly fewer women in intercollegiate athletics administration than men (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010), there may be consistencies in the experiences of women in these two powerful positions.

Although the literature has not focused on SWAs specifically in Division III, it is interesting to reveal if the participants in the current study have had similar experiences as SWAs who were studied previously.

Barriers for Female Athletics Administrators

Previous studies have revealed that a number of barriers exist for women who work in, or aspire to be employed in, intercollegiate athletics. Although women were once powerful players in the early days of women's intercollegiate athletics, it is clear that barriers are making these career advancements difficult to achieve. Lack of appropriate pathways, the "good old boys" network, negative stereotypes of women, and time demands are generally included when discussing the obstacles for women in the profession. Each will be addressed as follows. While the literature on barriers has focused on women in various athletics administration positions in Division I and II, understanding such barriers informs the current study of women who serve as athletics directors in Division III.

Lack of appropriate pathways

While getting on the right track for careers in athletics administration is imperative, women do not often get on the paths that typically lead to career advancement. Frequently, women are pigeonholed in a few areas of athletics and face difficult challenges when transferring to other offices. Life skills coordination, compliance office, and academic advising are the departmental units in which women tend to be placed; therefore, they do not have pertinent skills in other areas (Dohrn, 2003). Experience in marketing, donor relations, and business affairs is vital to advancement in Division I (Selby, 2001), and white men tend to gain those positions (Suggs, 2005). Suggs purported that, as athletics departments have been coaxed to diversify their staffs, they have hired women in token roles, while leaving the decision-making positions to white males. When explaining why few women obtain athletics director positions, lack of appropriate experience was commonly mentioned by several female athletics directors in Division I and II (Teel, 2005).

“Good old boys” network

The notion of the “good old boys” network is a barrier to women in athletics administration; particularly at the Division I level (Grappendorf, 2001; Quarterman, DuPree, & Willis, 2006). This type of networking can be referred to as homologous reproduction, meaning that people in dominant positions desire to work with persons who are similar to themselves (Sagas, Cunningham, & Teed, 2006). Those who select personnel in the hiring process are more likely to choose candidates who are alike, or of the same gender as themselves. Therefore, male athletics directors are more likely to hire men with similar characteristics, thus preventing women from obtaining these positions. In Teel’s study

(2005), the majority of Division I and II female athletics directors indicated the good old boys network had a “very strong” or “strong” influence in the hiring of female athletics administrators. Various Division I and II administrators indicated that the good old boys network was significant (Smith, 2005). Wicker (2008) and Yee (2007) also revealed the good old boys network to be well intact.

Selby’s (2001) qualitative study of female Division I athletics directors revealed that the lack of networking and interpersonal relationships with others in the profession were barriers to the advancement of women. Men can network with other men, whereas female/male interpersonal relationships in the workplace can be misinterpreted or frowned upon. Since women are underrepresented in athletics administration, men have more opportunities to network, thus reinforcing a barrier to women’s advancement (Selby). In a study of mentoring relationships in Division I and III, Weaver and Chelladurai (2002) also revealed that women had to rely on cross-gender mentoring, while men could count on being mentored by men. One participating SWA noted similar isolation from men on the athletics staff, even though she had been at the same institution for over 20 years (Yates, 2007). She was often an outsider looking in, which she perceived was a tactic for men to control her voice and authority in the organization.

Negative perceptions of women

In a recent study by Grappendorf and Lough (2006), approximately 77% of female athletics directors responded that one of the major barriers they face is the perception that women cannot lead appropriately. More specifically, they noted the following as barriers: (a) the perception that women do not know as much about intercollegiate athletics; (b) some

boosters are old school and only want to deal with men; (c) lack of trust in women leaders; (d) lack of respect and feeling that they have to be twice as good as their male counterparts; and (e) stereotypes associated with women in college athletics (Grappendorf & Lough). Women have also indicated the necessity to be overqualified and the feeling of always having to prove oneself (Smith, 2005). This is not a colorblind phenomenon, as women of color noted unsupportive environments and tokenism (Yee, 2007).

Participating female Division I athletics directors also indicated the negative perceptions of single women in athletics administration (Selby, 2001). There was often potential for sexual tension in the office, as single women were put in an awkward position to work primarily with men. Assumptions were often made that single women in athletics are lesbians or will pursue men in the department. Women remarked that men were unsure how to act and, as a result, they were watched closely for inappropriate conduct (Selby, 2001).

Being a woman in the male field of athletics administration has caused problems for women of various races. Noting similar stereotypes placed on them as Black female athletics directors, participants indicated they had often been labeled as lesbians or promiscuous. Heterosexual women in athletics administration often feel the need to reinforce their heterosexism, frequently through overt verbal or identity cues, such as wearing feminine hairstyles and clothing (McDowell, 2008). Female athletics administrators often perceive it is necessary to honor social norms regarding their appearance. Since they often faced scrutiny as women in a traditionally male field, professional dress and appearance were used as strategies to fit in their surroundings. They perceived that looking a certain way gave coworkers less opportunities to pass judgment on them (Dohrn, 2003).

Time demands

Grappendorf and Lough (2006) also revealed that many female athletics directors cited work and time demands as reasons for fewer women in the field. The women in this study were forthright that these positions require long hours, making family life difficult or even impossible. One woman participant said, “it is a difficult job and can be all consuming. It is difficult to have a life outside of the job” (p. 12). This position generally calls for a 50-80-hour work week, which is oftentimes not conducive to family or personal life (Quarterman, DuPree, & Willis, 2006). It is challenging to balance work and family life, regardless of age or experience (Dohrn, 2003). One of Dohrn’s participants remarked, “To be a mother and in college athletics administration or coaching is crazy. The hours are insane. I think that is why women are choosing to do other things” (p. 114). Time demands also make it challenging for women to network, which is necessary for career advancement in intercollegiate athletics. Lack of networking can hinder the professional development opportunities for women (Dohrn, 2003).

Time demands are often the reason women in athletics administration do not have spouses/partners or children (Quarterman, DuPree, & Willis, 2006; Teel, 2005). For women who are married or have partners, they must have supportive husbands/partners who are willing to share the workload at home (Teel, 2005). In a study of one SWA in Division I, Yates (2007) found that her participant’s life essentially revolved around her career in athletics. As a 57 year-old with no spouse/partner or children, she indicated that her social life was diminished as a result of her professional path (Yates).

The literature on barriers women face in athletics administration provides valuable foundational information about women in athletics administration and the potential

challenges they often face. Since the majority of previous literature has focused on women in Division I and II, there may or may not be similarities between those who have been studied previously and the women who participated in the current research.

Women in the Workforce

An abundance of literature exists on women in the workforce. While the focus of this study was women specifically in the narrow field of intercollegiate athletics administration, it is important to gain a better perspective of women in the workforce. To understand women in athletics leadership, it is helpful to understand the current state of women in the workforce and as leaders.

The U.S. workforce has changed considerably in the previous decade; the role of women has increased dramatically since the 1970s (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009). The percentage of women in the labor force has increased from approximately 45% in 1975 (Hesse-Biber, 2005) to 60% in 2009 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009). Not only are more women working, but they also currently make-up nearly half of workers, representing 47% of the U.S. labor force (Catalyst, 2009; U.S. Department of Labor, 2009).

Education has likely played a role in the increase of women workers, as women have earned college degrees with greater frequency than men since 1982 (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Nearly three-fourths (72%) of women and slightly over two-thirds (66%) of men who graduated from high school in 2008 were enrolled in college the following year (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009). Women represent 57% and 60% of undergraduate and graduate enrollments, respectively, at American colleges and universities (Edmonds, 2010). The increase of women in higher education institutions is expected to continue in the near future.

By 2011, there will be 2.6 more women studying in American institutions of higher education (“Female power,” 2010). As women attend college and earn degrees at a greater rate than men, their work opportunities increase. Not only are more women going to college, but also more of those college graduates are working. In 1963, 62% of women with college degrees were in the workforce. At the present time, 80% of college-educated women are in the labor force (“Female power,” 2010).

The glass ceiling

In a 1986 *Wall Street Journal* article, the term glass ceiling was first used as a metaphor to explain women’s unsuccessful attempts at rising professionally (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Even though the number of working women had been increasing since the 1970s, women were not often moving up to positions of authority in the 1980s. The term glass ceiling was used to represent an invisible barrier women faced when striving to advance professionally (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). According to Eagly and Carli (2007), the expression became a part of everyday American vernacular, as a means to describe the barriers women often face when climbing the corporate ladder. Organizational culture/structure, stereotypes (Powell & Graves, 2003), male normative career paths, the good old boys network, lack of mentors, tokenism, positionality (Hesse-Biber, 2005), and family responsibilities (Eagly & Carli, 2007) are among the barriers that have impeded the upward mobility for women in their organizations.

Women have taken strides since the 1980s, when the glass ceiling phrase was coined, and some argue that the glass ceiling is less absolute than it once was. According to Eagly and Carli (2007), a labyrinth is a more appropriate metaphor to describe the challenges

women often face in their careers. Rather than meeting the impenetrable barrier of the glass ceiling, women must navigate a maze of detours and challenges—a labyrinth. While the labyrinth has allowed for career advancement in some professions more than others (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009), statistics reveal that women continue to lag behind men in top leadership positions (Catalyst, 2009).

The number of women in the workforce has risen steadily since the 1970s (Hesse-Biber, 2005), but women are still underrepresented at the top levels of management. In 2009, 3% of CEOs, 13.5% of executive officers, and 15.2% of board members of Fortune 500 companies were women (Catalyst, 2009). Although these numbers are low considering the increase of women in the workforce, projections estimate that women will continue to gain ground in leadership positions. By 2027, it is predicted that women will occupy one fourth of Fortune 500 board seats (Hesse-Biber, 2005).

While women are not represented at the top of Fortune 500 companies, the numbers beyond the corporate elite offer more encouragement. When including all organizations in the United States, women occupy 23% of chief executive positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Specific to education, women have gained substantial ground. According to Eagly and Carli, in 2007, 64% of educational administrators and 23% of college and university presidents were women.

Work/life balance

Women with children are more likely to work than in years past (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009), and can be forced to make tough decisions regarding balancing their work and home lives. They often perceive it is necessary to choose between their career and

motherhood (“Female power,” 2010). For women in managerial and professional positions, which frequently demand long hours, the balancing act is challenging and exhausting (Eagly & Carli, 2007). For those attempting to “have it all,” women often feel the strain between their work and home domains (Hesse-Biber, 2005), which can lead to stress-related health issues (Paludi et al., 2007). The struggle to maintain both environments is challenging, and some may end up sacrificing one for the other. As women climb the corporate ladder, they are less likely to have a spouse and children. The opposite is true for men (Powell & Graves, 2003).

The division of labor in households has become more equal over time, but married women continue to carry a heavier workload in terms of household chores and child-rearing (Eagly & Carli, 2007). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009), on a typical day in 2004 to 2008, in which they completed household work, women spent an average of 2.6 hours on those activities, while men spent two hours on the same tasks. In addition to housework, women commonly serve as primary caregivers for dependent children. Since the mid-1980s, men’s contributions to childcare have increased, but women continue to spend twice as much time caring for children (Eagly & Carli, 2007). On average, women (in households with children under 18) spend 1.73 hours caring for children while men spend 0.84 hours completing those same tasks (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009).

The majority of literature related to the division of labor in households has focused on heterosexual cohabitating couples, but some research has focused on shared domestic tasks among lesbian couples. Compared to heterosexual and gay couples, lesbian couples were equally likely to do household work (Kurdek, as cited in Hesse-Biber, 2005). In a study of lesbian couples with children, Sullivan (1996) found that partners shared the household and

childcare workload, and were less likely to have one partner shouldering an unequal amount of the domestic tasks.

Information related to women in the workforce is important in framing the current study, because it enables readers to gain understanding of the current state of working women. Although the field of intercollegiate athletics administration is narrow, the participants in this study may have experienced the glass ceiling and work/life balance issues in their lives. Reviewing the literature about women in the workforce helps to gain a better understanding of the personal and professional experiences of the female athletics directors in this study.

Career Trajectory Model

Spilerman's (1977) career trajectory model was used in the current study to explore the background and professional experiences of the participants. This model enabled the researcher to determine the most typical career paths of selected female athletics directors in NCAA Division III. The career trajectory model aims to determine "a work history that is common to a portion of the labor force" and focuses on "a life-cycle phenomenon, typically a sequence of jobs" (p. 551) for a specific profession or position. A normative trajectory is determined by examining the sequential patterns of common positions that begin with a single entry point and culminate in reaching the top position. For the purposes of this study, career trajectory modeling helped to clarify the paths that female athletics directors in Division III typically take en route to obtaining athletics director positions.

Spilerman's model has been used to examine career trajectories of NCAA intercollegiate athletics directors (Fitzgerald, 1990; Fitzgerald, Sagaria, & Nelson, 1994;

Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin, 2004; Parrish, 2003), although the information has not been specific to women in Division III. Fitzgerald (1990) determined the normative career trajectories for athletics directors, identifying the following five career steps: college athlete, high school coach, college coach, assistant or associate athletics director, and athletics director. This career path determined by Fitzgerald has been used as a basis for continued study of athletics directors since its origin.

In the only study to consider differences in career trajectories for athletics directors in Division III, Fitzgerald et al. (1994) noted that career trajectories often differ between men and women, as well as among divisions. The normative career patterns specifically for women in Division III were not explored, but it was established they were the least likely to follow the normative career patterns of Division I athletics directors. Although this information is dated, it does indicate that career trajectories of participants in the current study are likely to be different than what has been found related to athletics directors in other divisions. The percentage of women serving as Division III athletics directors has increased dramatically since 1994; therefore, determining their normative career patterns is very useful information.

Work/Family Border Theory

Clark's (2000) work/family border theory was used in the current study to explore the personal and professional experiences of the participants. The theory helped to explain the ways selected female athletics directors in Division III navigate and balance their personal and professional roles. According to this theory, "people are daily border-crossers between

the domains of work and family” (p. 747) and, although “people shape their environments, they are, in turn, shaped by them” (p. 748).

Clark (2000) argued that there is a division between a person’s workplace and home, with each often having its own purpose, culture, language, and behaviors. Working professionals constantly manage their professional and personal roles and the borders between them when attempting to adequately balance both spheres. For some, the transition between the two domains is smooth; for others the contrasting environments present challenging transitions. In the current study, work/family border theory was used to clarify the personal and professional experiences of female athletics directors in Division III, and how they navigate their work and family systems.

The literature clearly indicates that time demands of the intercollegiate athletics administration present challenges for women and their family and personal relationships. While it is important to realize that time demands present significant barriers, the literature has not explored the professional and personal experiences of these women. Furthermore, since there has been little research specific to female athletics directors in Division III, the challenges related to their time demands are unknown. Work/family border theory is a relatively new concept, although it has been used in the field of higher education to study work/life balance of senior level development administrators (Jennings, 2007).

Summary

This chapter provided a review of literature relevant to this study. Division III intercollegiate athletics were discussed, enabling the audience to understand the unique characteristics of this competitive division within the NCAA governance structure. A brief

historical overview of women as intercollegiate athletics administrators provided an important foundation for the current study, because paths for women in this profession have been largely impacted by the national governance of intercollegiate athletics, particularly since the passage of Title IX.

Literature specific to women as intercollegiate athletics administrators provided a basis for understanding women in athletics and the findings of previous studies. The literature specific to women as athletics directors, the Senior Woman Administrator designation (SWA), and challenges confronting female athletics administrators were examined in this section.

To widen the scope of the current study across disciplines, research focused on women in the workforce was also discussed in this literature review. Although an abundance of literature exists related to working women, this portion provided a brief glimpse of relevant information that helped frame the study beyond the narrow field of intercollegiate athletics.

Finally, the theoretical framework of Spilerman's (1977) career trajectory model and Clark's (2000) work/family border theory were described in this chapter, as they were used to frame the current study. Career trajectory was used to better understand the participants' career paths. Work/family border theory helped to explain how the participants' family and personal lives have impacted their professional experiences and vice versa.

The next chapter will present the methodology of the study, including philosophical foundations, phenomenology, and methods. Chapter 3 will also provide a rationale for methodological decisions and explain how the study was conducted.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The Qualitative Paradigm

The educational, professional, and personal experiences of women who serve as athletics directors at NCAA Division III member institutions were sought and analyzed in this study. In order to fully grasp the uniqueness of their lives and roles, qualitative research was appropriate because it enables researchers to “understand in depth the rich lives of human beings and the world in which we live” (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006, p. 2). This dense description of the participants’ lived experiences is best accomplished through use of qualitative methods. When using a qualitative approach, the elements of the research design must align as they inform one another throughout the process. Epistemology is the theory of knowledge “embedded in the theoretical perspective” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). “Theoretical perspective lies behind the methodology” (p. 2). “Methodology governs our choice and use of methods” (p. 2), and methods are “the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyse data” (p. 3). Since these four design elements are intertwined, it is crucial that qualitative methodologists make decisions carefully.

Epistemology: Constructivism

As philosophical foundations for the study, the epistemological and theoretical perspectives “should be evident in all aspects of the research design” (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006, p. 39). Constructivism, which places emphasis on “the meaning-making of the individual mind” (Crotty, 1998, p. 58), was the epistemological foundation for the study. The interplay between researcher and participant are central to this worldview, as the meanings of the participants’ life experiences are constructed between the participant and

researcher. Constructivism was an appropriate epistemological choice for the study because the participants constructed meaning of their experiences, and this epistemology focuses on making meaning by the individual mind. Since this study sought to understand how the participants interpreted their own professional, educational, and personal experiences specific to their roles as female athletics directors in NCAA Division III athletics, constructivism was a suitable epistemological foundation.

Theoretical perspective: Interpretivism

According to Broido and Manning (2002), research “cannot be conducted without the conscious use of underlying theoretical perspectives” (p. 434). As the theoretical perspective, or “philosophical stance lying behind a methodology” (Crotty, 1998, p. 66), interpretivism informed and provided underpinnings for the study. Interpretive research uses human interpretation to develop knowledge about the world (Prasad, 2005), as “Multiple realities are constructed socially by individuals” (Merriam, 1998, p. 4). Interpretivism aligned well with this research because knowledge was constructed by the participants through their interpretations of their experiences as female athletics directors which guided the study.

Methodology: Phenomenology

This study was guided methodologically by phenomenology. When studying the unique experiences of the participants, phenomenology was appropriate because the meanings they ascribed to their experiences were central to understanding what it is like to be a female athletics director in Division III. The goal of phenomenology is to focus the participants’ lived experiences to a central meaning, or “essence” (Moustakas, 1994). The

purpose of this study was to understand the professional, educational, and personal experiences of the participants. As the researcher, the best way to fully understand their experiences is to comprehend the essence of their experiences, ideally through in-depth interviews and observations (Patton, 2002). Through these interactions with participants, I gained insight into their lived professional, educational, and personal experiences. Since phenomenology “requires us to engage with phenomena in our world and make sense of them directly and immediately” (Crotty, 1998, p. 79), it appropriately guided the methods used in the study.

When using this methodological approach, investigators identify a phenomenon and examine the meanings it holds for participants (Creswell, 1998), while also realizing the presuppositions they, as researchers, bring to the study. Phenomenologists must not attempt to disregard or ignore their preconceptions regarding the phenomena being studied. Phenomenology expects that researchers come to a study with previous knowledge or experience of the topic, but attempts to disregard or ignore such thoughts would be counterproductive (Creswell). Therefore, researchers must take inventory of their experiences related to the topic, which is known as bracketing (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006) or epoche (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). As the researcher in this phenomenological study, I bracketed my assumptions of the participants’ experiences throughout the research process. Through reading relevant literature on women athletics administrators and due to my own experiences in intercollegiate athletics, it would have been impossible to set aside my understandings related to women in this profession. Throughout the research process, it was important that I continuously bracketed my thoughts, enabling the meanings made by the

participants to shine through. As mentioned later in this chapter, I utilized a researcher reflexive journal to bracket my thoughts and assumptions throughout the project.

The purpose of the study was to understand the experiences of women who serve as Division III athletics directors, not to prove that certain circumstances exist. According to Jurema, Correia-Pimentel, Cordeiro, and Austregesilo Nepomuceno (2006):

Phenomenological research entails unraveling the internal structures of meanings, not to proving or demonstrating. There are no hypotheses that guide the work and which demand support. There are no truths to be confirmed. Phenomenological research begins with lived experience, the concreteness of life, and the unique. This is the essence which is explored.
(p. 1)

By privileging the participants' stories, their lived experiences were brought to the forefront, enabling others to understand what it means to be a female athletics director in Division III.

Data Sources

This study focused on the professional, educational, and personal experiences of current female athletics directors at NCAA Division III member institutions. Athletics directors were "purposefully selected" (Creswell, 2009, p. 179) for the study, using specific criteria to determine a list of potential participants. The criteria included years and types of professional experience in NCAA intercollegiate athletics, type of institution(s), and current geographic location. Guidelines for determining the number of participants in qualitative research vary (Creswell, 1998; Seidman, 2006), but the objective is to reach data saturation (Seidman, 2006). I interviewed seven women, and then determined that saturation had been reached.

Recruitment of participants

When recruiting participants for the study, greatest priority was given to those who best met the following selection criteria: (a) significant years of professional experience in NCAA athletics, particularly Division III; (b) current employment at traditional residential, private institutions; and (c) geographic location in the Midwest region. Selection criteria were met by a suitable number of participants; therefore, they were not modified.

Selection criteria included having at least 10 years of professional experience within NCAA intercollegiate athletics, ideally with much of this time spent at the Division III level. It was desired that participants had at least 10 years of professional experience in the field, because their career trajectories were important aspects of the research. A primary goal of this research was to study women who had chosen to remain at Division III institutions; therefore, it was important to include participants with significant professional experience at this level. As described in previous chapters, Division III has a unique philosophy toward intercollegiate athletics, and the participants' respective commitments to this philosophy were important aspects of the research. Previous research has studied women in Division I and II, whereas this study explored the experiences of women who are vested in Division III. I was fortunate to locate participants who had many years of experience within Division III athletics, which enabled me to discover what it means to be an athletics director within this unique division.

At the time the data were collected, the participants were employed at traditional residential, private institutions. Private colleges and universities comprise 80% of the Division III membership, with an average enrollment of 2,248 (NCAA, 2009, Division III). These statistics reveal that the quintessential Division III athletics experience exists at

private, small colleges and universities; therefore, women from these institutions were desirable participants. The women's experiences could have varied depending on the type and size of institution, as institutions and athletics departments all have unique characteristics that can alter employees' experiences. However, for the purpose of this study, women serving as athletics directors at small, private institutions within Division III were selected to participate. Small colleges are often defined as having enrollments of fewer than 5,000 students (Westfall, 2006).

This study focused on women who serve as athletics directors in the Midwest region of the United States. Face-to-face interaction with participants was vital for data collection; therefore, the participants were located within a reasonable driving distance from Ames, Iowa. Although the experiences of Division III female athletics directors could vary greatly depending on the geographic location of their institutions, this study focused on those in states within the Midwest. There are 122 Division III institutions within this region, and 21 women serve athletics directors at these institutions. Among the 20 female athletics directors in the region, 10 women met the desired criteria and were invited to participate. Eight women responded with interest in participating. After conducting interviews with seven participants, it was determined that data saturation had been met.

Data Collection

In the fall of 2009, I contacted the Division III staff at the NCAA headquarters and obtained the list of women who were serving as athletics directors in this division. From this list, I identified a group of 10 potential respondents within the Midwest region who met the desired criteria. After approval was granted from Iowa State University's Institutional

Review Board (IRB), I contacted potential respondents through email to determine their interest in participating (see Appendix A: Recruitment Email).

Since data collection with each respondent was to occur over three days, it was imperative to communicate the depth and length of this commitment with participants from the onset. My experiences in Division III, both as a student-athlete and coach, were useful in making connections with potential participants and developing rapport. Eight women responded to the initial email inquiry. Then I contacted IRB administrators at each of the respective institutions to gain approval for these women to participate. After each institution granted permission for me to conduct research with their respective athletics directors, I made arrangements to collect data in the spring of 2010.

Although there are numerous potential data collection methods utilized in phenomenology, in-depth interviews are the most common (Creswell, 1998) and provided the majority of data for this study. When explaining the purpose of interviewing, Seidman (2006) stated, “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 9). In order to fully understand the essence and meaning of the participants’ experience(s), it is important to appreciate the depth, which is often obtained through interviews (Patton, 2002). In addition to interviews with each participant, document analysis was used to provide context and supplement the interview data. The analysis of various types of data from diverse sources created rich descriptions of the participants’ educational, professional, and personal experiences.

Interviews

To obtain ample in-depth data necessary for the study, each participant took part in a series of three interviews, as recommended by Seidman (2006). Prior to the first interview session, research procedures and confidentiality measures were explained to each participant, which enabled them fully understand their rights as participants. The interviews were semi-structured, guided by a scripted set of questions (see Appendix B: Informed Consent Document and Appendix C: Interview Protocol), and I interjected with follow-up questions as appropriate. The following topical sequence was developed by Dolbeare and Schuman (1982, as cited in Seidman, 2006) and is recommended for the three interview series of phenomenological interviews.

1. Interview one: Focused life history – The researcher seeks information regarding the participants' life experiences related to the topic up to the present time. I asked questions about the participants' professional, educational, and personal histories as related to intercollegiate athletics.
2. Interview two: Details of experience – The purpose of this interview is to focus on the details of the participants' present lived experiences related to the topic. Information regarding their daily professional and personal experiences as related to intercollegiate athletics was sought in these sessions.
3. Interview three: Reflection on the meaning – In the final meeting, participants are asked to make meaning of their lived experiences. These sessions served to wrap-up data collection, as participants were asked to describe their understandings of their lived experiences as related to intercollegiate athletics.

I conducted two face-to-face interviews with each participant during my campus visits, plus one additional phone interview approximately one week following. Spacing out the interviews enables participants to reflect on the previous interview without losing connection between sessions. Although it is recommended that interviews are spaced a few days apart, this was dependent on the amount of time each participant had available. While Seidman (2006) recommended that interviews be spaced three days to a week apart, he recognized this is not always possible. “As long as a structure is maintained that allows participants to reconstruct and reflect upon their experience within the context of their lives, alterations to the...spacing of interviews can certainly be explored” (Seidman, 2006, pp. 21-22). The two in-person interviews were primarily conducted on two consecutive days, with the third and final phone interview taking place approximately one week later. Although the spacing of the interviews was altered slightly from Seidman’s suggested format, it was determined that appropriate and ample data were gathered. Data were collected during a seven-week period in April and May of 2010.

Building rapport

In order to build rapport and ensure that the participants understood the study’s procedures prior to data collection, I sent copies of the dissertation proposal, interview protocol, and human subjects approval paperwork via email. The participants’ review of these materials was not mandatory, but I desired for them to have as much information as they felt was necessary. Additionally, I called each participant prior to my campus visit, giving each person another opportunity to ask questions. These email and telephone conversations provided opportunities for the participants and me to build rapport prior to our

interview sessions. Consequently, we had established a basis when we met for the interviews.

Building strong rapport is vital to the interviewing process because, otherwise, participants may not disclose useful and appropriate information to me. According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), “Interviewers should have superb listening skills and be skillful at personal interaction” (p. 110); therefore, my approach to our sessions were important. I am comfortable with my ability to relate to people and am confident that rapport developed quickly and easily between participants and me. My experience as a student-athlete, coach, and athletics administrator assisted me in developing rapport and credibility. My desire to know the participants’ stories was evident, and they were ready and willing to provide rich descriptions of their experiences. Since “curiosity, – an enquiring mind – is an essential asset in an in-depth interviewer” (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003, p. 142), I was able to use my natural inquisitiveness to assist in gathering data.

Document analysis

While interviews provided the majority of the data, documents served as complimentary data that provided insight leading to and following the interviews. For this portion of the study, I examined various documents obtained directly from participants; documents that were requested included résumés, job descriptions, and organizational charts. As stated by Marshall and Rossman (1999), “The review of documents is an unobtrusive method, rich in portraying the values and beliefs of participants in the setting” (p. 116). I sought these documents prior to my campus visits, as the documents helped frame the interview questions. Examining these documents enabled me to gain an understanding of

each participants' professional experiences while preparing for the interview sessions. In addition to interview preparation, these documents contributed complementary data as well. Résumés provided me with insights regarding the participants' educational, professional, and life paths. Job descriptions and organizational charts were also relevant, because they helped to understand the employees and responsibilities these women supervise and oversee. Thus, document analysis assisted in the preparation for my visits as well as provided important data for the study.

Reflexive journal

One additional component of the study was the recording and analyzing of my thoughts in a reflective research journal, as “reflexivity is important in striving for objectivity and neutrality” (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p. 20). Throughout the entire research process, I kept a journal to record my thoughts and perceptions related to the study. The many hours I spent driving to and from campus visits also provided essential opportunities for me to reflect on the participants' experiences and the ongoing study. The physical journal as well as the journal I kept in my mind were important tools as I bracketed my thoughts and assumptions. They were vital during the preparation phase, the data collection process, and also aided in the analysis of data. A reflexive journal improves the credibility of a qualitative researcher and enhances the trustworthiness of the study (Patton, 2002).

Data Analysis

As it continued to provide the methodological roadmap for the study, phenomenology also guided data analysis. “Phenomenological analysis seeks to grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of a phenomenon for a person or

group of people” (Patton, 2002, p. 482). As was done several times throughout the research process, a key early step in phenomenological data analysis was epoche (Moustakas, 1994) and bracketing. I had many personal reactions to the data as they were collected; therefore, being aware of these reactions was crucial prior to proceeding with analysis and interpretation. In epoche, “the everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings are set aside, and the phenomena are revisited” (Moustakas, p. 33). The second step is phenomenological reduction, in which “the researcher ‘brackets out’ the world and presuppositions to identify the data in pure form, uncontaminated extraneous intrusions” (Patton, 2002, p. 485). The reflexive journal played a pivotal role in the bracketing process as I collected data from participants. I was able to set aside any thoughts I had throughout the data collection process and clear my head prior to subsequent interview sessions.

As data were collected, the raw digital audio files were sent to a professional transcriptionist. When transcription was completed and documents were provided to me, I immersed myself in the data in order to comprehensively understand what I had compiled. By listening to each audio file while reviewing the corresponding transcripts line by line, I was able to “become increasingly intimate with the data” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 152), and also check for potential transcription errors.

Following the epoche and bracketing procedures and initial review of each audio file and transcript, the next step of phenomenological data analysis was coding and identifying of themes. Data were organized using QSR NVivo 8, a qualitative data analysis software program. NVivo was an important tool in the analysis phase as it helped me to organize the large amount of data, allowing for more accurate analysis and identification of themes. In the coding process, the data are initially “horizontalized” (Patton, 2002, p. 486), meaning

they are laid out and given equal value. Data were then organized into meaningful groups and coded into themes that emerged. In qualitative analysis, it is important to allow themes to emerge in the coding process. Open coding is the process of reading the data line-by-line, without using predetermined codes (Esterberg, 2002). This provides an opportunity to “see what is going on” (p. 158) in the data. This was followed by focused coding, in which the key themes that emerged in open coding were identified and further organized (Esterberg, 2002). It was through this data analysis process that the essence of the participants’ lived experiences was understood. After analyzing, coding, and organizing the data, the information was organized into three major themes of findings, which are presented and discussed in Chapter 4.

Trustworthiness Criteria

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is used in reference to the overall quality of a study; however, qualitative scholars continue to debate about how to measure and refer to the validity and reliability of qualitative research (Merriam, 1998, 2002). Internal validity and reliability are two criteria Merriam (1998, 2002) suggested to utilize in evaluating the trustworthiness of a study. Described in greater detail as follows, triangulation of data, member checks, and an audit trail are trustworthiness enhancement strategies that were used throughout the research process.

While I tried to ensure as much trustworthiness as possible, a perfect study remains an elusive concept. As a researcher, I was prepared for potential pitfalls in order to avoid them as much as I could or address them appropriately once they arose. One threat to validity may have been in my interpretation of the data due to my experience and

professional aspirations in intercollegiate athletics. As a woman employed in intercollegiate athletics with scholarly understandings of the phenomena, it was important that I constantly bracketed my related thoughts and experiences. Even though my career in this field has enabled me to be cognizant of the experiences of some women in athletics administration prior to conducting this research, it was crucial that I did not make assumptions in the interpretations of the data. Wolcott (1994) addressed this common problem in *Transforming qualitative data*:

Qualitative researchers are welcome to their opinions, but focused inquiry is not a soapbox from which researchers may make any pronouncement they wish. Plainly put, studies purported to be research-based must be just that. When the claim is made that an interpretation derives from qualitative/descriptive inquiry, the link should be relevant and clear. (p. 37)

As mentioned previously, bracketing throughout the research process helped me to avoid assumptions by setting aside my related thoughts, allowing the participants' interpretations to emerge. Supporting evidence of my interpretations is provided throughout Chapters 4 and 5, in the form of participant quotations taken directly from the raw data. The trustworthiness of the study was enhanced by diligently adhering to the following strategies.

Triangulation of data

By gathering data through interviews and multiple forms of document analysis, triangulation was met in data collection. Triangulation is one of the most often used strategies to increase the internal validity of qualitative research and it also enhances the reliability of a study (Merriam, 1998, 2002). While triangulation does not ensure validity, it enhances the depth and thick description of the participants' experiences, which is crucial in qualitative research. When referring to triangulation of data in an interpretive study such as

this, Merriam (2002) stated, “From an interpretive perspective, triangulation remains a principal strategy to ensure for validity and reliability” (p. 26). The study’s primary source of data was transcriptions from one-on-one interviews with participants, with document analysis providing important contextual information. Résumés, organizational charts, and job descriptions were obtained from participants, providing important contextual information for the study. Large amounts of interview data, combined with the secondary data sources of documents, allowed for deep understandings of the participants’ experiences.

Member checks

Another common tactic, in addition to data triangulation, to enhance the internal validity of a qualitative study is member checks (Merriam, 1998, 2002). Member checks were completed by sending raw transcripts, participant profiles, and interpreted information to the participants through email. The participants were given the opportunity to approve or comment on these items, however, most indicated that time did not permit them to do so, or they were pleased with the work and only requested minor changes. This process helped to ensure that the participants were represented with great accuracy. I greatly appreciated the women participating in the study and strongly desired to interpret their experiences correctly; therefore I sought their assistance in examining all data analysis for accuracy. As a researcher, it was my responsibility to accurately depict their experiences as best as possible.

Audit trail

In addition to data triangulation and member checks, an audit trail was used to improve the reliability of the study (Merriam, 1998, 2002). “An audit trail in a qualitative study describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how

decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (Merriam, 2002, p. 27). I compiled an audit trail throughout the entire project, which consisted of my detailed reflexive journal and a chronological data collection list. The reflexive journal was particularly important in the data collection process, as I was able to take notes from one interview to the next, bracket my thoughts, as well as prepare for subsequent interview sessions. The chronological data collection list was an important aspect of strict adherence to detail that I employed throughout the project.

Delimitations

This study examined the experiences of a select group of women who currently serve as athletics directors at NCAA Division III member institutions in the Midwest. I traveled to meet with the participants on their respective campuses; therefore, the participants were limited to Division III institutions within reasonable driving distance from Ames, Iowa. The experiences of female athletics directors could vary depending on their geographic location; therefore, this study was delimited by the participants’ respective locations. For example, social norms in the Midwest region could differ from those in the East or West; therefore, findings should not be extended to the entire population of female athletics directors within Division III. Furthermore, it is not known if the findings would be applicable to athletics directors at other Division III institutions. Among the 447 Division III member institutions (NCAA, 2009, “Division III facts”), each institution is unique; therefore, many factors could contribute to similar or different experiences for women in comparable positions.

Finally, the results should not be extended to women serving in athletics director positions at other competitive levels of intercollegiate athletics, including NCAA Division I and II, National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), National Junior College

Athletic Association (NJCAA), and National Christian College Athletic Association (NCCAA). The circumstances and responsibilities for women in athletics director positions at other levels may be different than the women who participated in this study.

Limitations

The size of the participant pool was a potential challenge I was prepared to face. I realized I would, perhaps, have to be flexible when recruiting the participants, since I was interested in women who met very specific criteria and were limited to a precise geographic region of the country. Taking part in the study required a significant amount of the participants' time over a two-week period, so I was cautious about locating available participants and scheduling the visits within their busy schedules. This was not an issue; however, as eight of the ten women initially contacted were willing to participate and allow time for interviews despite their frenetic schedules. Fortunately, I did not have to alter the selection criteria or widen the geographic area to solidify sufficient participants. The goal of qualitative research is not to select a large pool of participants but, rather, to gain rich description of the participants' experiences and reach data saturation. After collecting data from seven participants, I determined that such data saturation had been met (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006).

With any research involving human respondents, there is an assumption that participants respond truthfully and candidly. In order to truly understand the educational, professional, and personal experiences of these women, I relied on their willingness to tell their stories. While I am confident in my ability to interact with others and build rapport, I was not sure if participants would be willing to share rich descriptions of their experiences with a relative stranger. After we had arranged our interview times and dates, I provided the

dissertation proposal, interview protocol, and human subjects approval paperwork via email so they knew what to expect in the data collection process. By exchanging emails and speaking on the telephone prior to my campus visits, I found that participants were very comfortable and candid with me in our interview sessions. I was able collect data until the research questions could be appropriately addressed and data saturation had been reached.

Ethical Considerations

Another critical factor in measuring the “goodness” of a qualitative study is determining whether it was conducted in an ethical manner (Merriam, 1998, 2002). Protecting participants in the research study was crucial, and started with gaining human subjects approval from the Institutional Review Board at Iowa State University. After human subjects approval was gained, I made contact with potential participants. When athletics directors responded with interest in participating, I gained human subjects approval from each of their respective institutions as well. The participants experienced very little risk, if any, by participating in the study; nevertheless, the following measures were taken to ensure the study was conducted in an ethical manner:

- Involvement in the study was voluntary and the participants could withdraw at any time.
- The participants could refuse to provide documents for document analysis of data collection.
- During interviews, the participants could skip any questions they did not wish to answer.

- Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the participants, both in the raw data provided to the transcriptionist and in the final dissertation.

Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology and methods for the study, while also explaining the rationale behind methodological decisions. Qualitative research allows researchers to make several decisions in designing a study, which were explained in this chapter. The next chapter provides detailed participant profiles and describes the results of the study.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

The results of the study are presented in this chapter. First, participant profiles provide brief descriptions of the participants' career paths and personal statuses. Second, data from the study are presented and explained. When exploring and describing the participants' educational, professional, and personal experiences, the results are organized into three major areas which are described as follows. Throughout this chapter, participant quotations provide examples and illustrations of their experiences.

The first section—*How Did They Get Here?*—describes the participants' experiences leading to their attainment of athletics director positions. This section provides important background information on the participants, their early interest in sports, educational pursuits, career paths, and professional relationships.

The second section—*Why Do They Stay?*—explores the participants' experiences specifically related to their positions as Division III athletics directors. Duties and responsibilities of their positions, long work hours, being *female* athletics directors, and passion for Division III athletics, are major themes that emerged when discussing their roles as female athletics directors in NCAA Division III.

The third and final section—*The Balancing Act*—provides information related to participating athletics directors' work/life balance. This section explores the ways participants' personal and professional lives have intertwined, how they balance people closest to them, tactics for making it all work, and their promotion of work/life balance.

Participant Profiles

Brief descriptions of the participants are presented in order to introduce them prior to explaining the study's findings. Glimpses of their respective career paths and current personal circumstances are included. The participants selected their pseudonyms, which are used to provide confidentiality and protect their identities.

Andrea

A former Division III student-athlete, Andrea has spent nearly her entire professional life at one Division III institution (which is not her alma mater). She spent four early years as an athletic trainer in the private sector and then moved to college athletics, where she rose through her department's ranks. After 10 years as head athletic trainer, she experienced a severe case of burnout, and transitioned to an administrative role. She served as the associate director of women's athletics and the director of women's athletics, before a promotion to director of athletics three years ago. Andrea has been in a relationship with her partner for 15 years, with whom she has a young daughter.

Annamaria

While she is currently a Division III athletics director, the bulk of Annamaria's professional career was spent in Division I athletics, at two different institutions. A physical education major who played three sports at a small college, she began her athletics career coaching basketball and volleyball at a university in her hometown. After she spent 17 years coaching and served as an assistant and associate athletics director at the same institution, she transitioned to a different university where she was an administrator for 11 years. She has been in Division III for six years, as the athletics director at her current institution. Although

she was engaged at one point in her twenties, Annamaria is currently single and does not have children.

Linda

Athletics have played a significant role in Linda's life, despite the lack of women's intercollegiate athletics opportunities at her alma mater. A secondary educator for 17 years prior to her career in college athletics, she has now been in the profession for 23 years. She has worked at three Division III institutions, first as a coach and assistant athletics director, then as athletics director at two different institutions. She first served as athletics director for six years, and has been at her current institution for 11 years. Never married, Linda's long-term boyfriend passed away four years ago. She does not have children.

Madison

Shortly after graduating from college 24 years ago, Madison accepted the head volleyball and basketball positions at a small college, and she never left. When she gained athletics director duties 18 years ago, she dropped the volleyball position but continued to coach basketball. Two years ago she was promoted to an advisory role to the college president, forcing her to relinquish her basketball duties after 22 years on the sidelines. A Division I basketball player, she has fallen in love with Division III athletics and the small college atmosphere. Despite her full admission that she "is horrible" at work/life balance, Madison has been with her partner for seven years. She does not have children.

Margaret

As a former swimming coach of 25 years, the greater part of Margaret's career has been spent on a pool deck. She began her involvement in Division III athletics as a student-

athlete, as she competed in swimming for three years before enduring a career-ending injury. It was not long after college that she began her coaching career, in which she coached at two Division III institutions. While coaching she gained administrative duties, and spent time as assistant and associate athletics director, budget manager, and SWA. She moved to a different Division III institution to become athletics director, where she has been in her current position for two years. Margaret has a long-term boyfriend, although they currently reside in different parts of the country. She does not have children.

Melanie

Since her sophomore year in college, Melanie has been focused on her eventual goal of becoming a college athletics director. A basketball and softball player in college, she spent time as a graduate assistant softball coach before landing a Division III head coaching position just two years removed from college. After a quick rise through the coaching and administrative ranks, her dream to be an athletics director came true sooner than anticipated; she was 31 years of age. She has held this position of athletics director for four years. Melanie met her husband while in college and they married when she was in graduate school. They have three young daughters.

Sue

Throughout her career in college athletics, Sue has experienced all levels of NCAA athletics. A former Division III student-athlete, she held basketball coaching positions in all three competitive divisions. In a coaching career that spanned 16 years, she was a graduate assistant, an assistant coach, and served as head coach at three institutions. Six years ago she gave up coaching to accept her first Division III athletics director position. She served in this

capacity for four years and then transitioned to another Division III institution, where she has been athletics director for two years. Sue has been in a relationship with her partner throughout her professional journey and they have an adult son.

How Did They Get Here?

While their professional careers revolve around intercollegiate athletics, the participants have been largely impacted by sports their entire lives. Data analysis brought forth a recurring theme that the participants' constant involvement and passion for athletics, in their various life stages, encouraged them to pursue careers in the field. Since they work within the context of college athletics and higher education, their educational experiences were important steps in their progressions. The data also reveal how the participants have prepared professionally for their ascensions to athletics director positions.

Early interest in sports

While intercollegiate athletics is the chosen profession for the athletics directors who participated in this study, their respective interests in sports can be traced back to their childhoods. Understanding their roots in athletics helps to realize the role sports have played throughout their entire lives, as eventually athletics became the focal point of their professional careers. The participants recalled sports playing important roles when they were young, much of which was done recreationally with siblings or neighborhood friends. As Andrea stated:

It seemed like I was always outside doing something, sport wise. Right now it's a source of laughter between me and my Mom, because she always tried to push me to wear the dresses and the skirts. And I was the shorts and the pants and the balls and the bats. My doll buggy was not a buggy for dolls; it

was a place to transport my roller skates. I was always involved and active and outside in sports, as far as I can remember.

Opportunities for organized youth sports varied. While most organized sports did not begin until junior high, pony league softball and youth basketball camps provided some opportunities for participants in elementary school. Few organized opportunities existed for Linda: *“We’d just get together and do things in the backyard. You’d play ball. You’d do races. We were just always active.”* Melanie had limited opportunities for organized sports, a byproduct of her surroundings:

I grew up in a really small area; I grew up on a farm. It was a very rural area so we didn’t have a lot of organized youth sports like you might see—that my kids have now. So I grew up playing a lot of softball in the front yard and basketball. My dad’s machine shed had cement and a big basketball hoop in it, and the free throw line and the three point line painted out for me.

Margaret was a competitive swimmer from age six, but also spent much of her free time playing outside: *“We lived in the city, but we lived on a block and we played baseball in the street. We played capture the flag until 10-11 o’clock at night.”* Continuing to reminisce about her childhood and the role of physical activity and sports, Margaret said, *“My childhood was all about play and recess. I mean even in grade school there was field day. Well it was a big deal to do great in field day, because you got ribbons at field day.”*

Oftentimes being involved in sports as a child meant playing with the boys, but this appeared to suit the women just fine. Madison, who would eventually play Division I basketball, credited playing with boys for her success:

I played basketball with the boys. We played at this little gym called the pit and it was the social thing to do. I’d be like, “I’m going to the pit for two hours.” On a Sunday after church we’d go home and change clothes and go play basketball. So I think you get good --- I got good, by playing against boys.

Some recalled more youth sports opportunities for boys in their communities, although it did not impair their enthusiasm for athletics. As Annamaria stated, she did not give much thought to the notion that boys may have had more opportunities in recalling:

I didn't know any different. I wasn't upset about it, I wasn't using it, I didn't want it to be my career. You read about kids that get on boys' teams because they are 'it's not fair' and all that. I wasn't that, I just enjoyed it; I wasn't forced into it.

Physical education classes were also an important opportunity to become involved and interested in sports. Andrea spoke of the great impact this environment had for her development:

In physical education, that is where I felt comfortable. PE class, that's where I fit in. I was kind of a tomboy type kid and really didn't fit in with the girly girl stuff, for whatever reason. I didn't, I didn't feel comfortable. I wasn't really included, but the times that I did fit in and the times I felt most comfortable as a kid, was when I was playing sports.

Regardless of the organized sports opportunities in their communities, the participants found ways to take part in their favorite recreational activities, simply because it was fun. As Melanie stated, “Anything that was athletic or had a ball associated with it, I really just wanted to do it.”

Familial impact on sports

The participants discussed the vital roles their parents and siblings played in their interest in athletics. Although their families played varying roles in their athletics experiences, family involvement in athletics was a common theme amongst the participants. As the daughter of a former college football player, Sue's family first introduced to her athletics from the fan perspective. Although she eventually became active in athletics

herself, her initial remarks were related to her family's fanatical following of her father's alma mater:

I grew up in a family where intercollegiate athletics was pretty strong. My father played at Ohio State for Woody Hayes so I grew up on Saturday mornings with the radio blaring with the Ohio State fight song and everybody getting anxiously ready for football.

In addition to Sue's father at Ohio State, others mentioned their fathers' high school and college athletics careers as early contributing factors to their interest in sports. The participants recalled family involvement in athletics and simply being around sports frequently. According to Annamaria:

I didn't have guidance into sports, but it was around me all the time. When I was little my dad was still pitching and in semi-pro softball and all that kind of stuff and so it was always around us. We were always at fields or somewhere. So we had it kind of engrained in us.

The only participant who mentioned being coached by a parent, Margaret was mentored by her mother for many years. When recalling that mother/daughter, coach/athlete relationship, she said:

My mom was my coach. She was the head coach of a local YWCA team that was ragingly successful. She had the state champions and all the record holders, so all of the young girls, teenage-level kids that I grew up with grew up around were hugely successful in that sport.

While just one participant indicated that her parent was a coach, several discussed the supportive role their parents played. One mentioned the basketball hoop in her parents' machine shed; another recalled her father's long-standing commitment to be her rebounder on the basketball court. Participants clearly valued the role their parents, particularly their fathers, played in their athletics experiences. "My dad was like the perfect dad for sports

because he never put a lot of pressure on, but he was always so proud of accomplishments and things you did,” remarked Madison. Later, she mentioned:

He really was instrumental in sort of always being that quiet supporter, but yet very proud of your accomplishment. So you kind of wanted to do things to make him happy, but at the same time I liked sports and I was decent at it, so I think it all kind of just came together.

Each of the participants has siblings that were, to some extent, involved in athletics in their youth, too. The youngest of five children, Melanie followed in her brother’s footsteps much more so than she did her sisters, who were not as involved in athletics: *“He was the one who really taught me everything I know about sport.”* Sue’s athletics experiences were very much intertwined with her brother’s as well. She recalled their unique bond through athletics:

One of the unique things between my brother and I, we were most competitive brother and sister pair that you would find, against one another, but respectfully. We went to a pretty small high school, so during my basketball season he would write the articles for the local newspaper and during his football season, I wrote the articles for the football team in the fall. So kind of a neat, cooperative spirit thing.

While their families exposed them to sports when they were young, participants also mentioned other opportunities their families encouraged; it was not all about sports. Sue recalled activities outside of athletics: *“They were also pretty diligent about the fact that we would be versatile, so we took tap lessons, we took piano lessons. They had us pretty engaged.”* Annamaria tried other activities her parents provided, but she did not take to them like she did sports: *“My mom is actually a musician and I tried piano and I didn’t like it. It was too boring for me. So I guess it wasn’t that we weren’t exposed anything else, but it was the fun thing to do.”*

Organized sports

While they were interested in sports in their youth, the women became more involved in organized sports in junior high and high school. Other than Margaret, who focused her efforts on swimming, the most common sports played in the participants' teenage years were basketball, softball, and volleyball. Athletics played important roles in the participants' development at this life stage. For Madison, sports became her identity, largely because her high school teams were very successful. In recalling those experiences, she said:

I grew up in a really small town, 2000 people, so the only thing to do in that town was sports. Sports were kind of the icon. Basketball teams when I was little—a couple of the teams ahead of me had won state championships, so that was a big deal, like the fire trucks and everything. So sports were kind of your identity in the small town.

While she was a stellar student and took her academics very seriously, Melanie remarked on the importance of athletics at that time in her life:

If you think about yourself as a student athlete, can you imagine going to school without having your sport? It just became part of who I was. It was really my identity; everything around me was associated with that. Even though I was valedictorian of my high school graduating class and all those things, definitely much more labeled and much more memorable was my athletic experience.

Although athletics were important during their junior high and high school years, several participants commented on their experiences and how they were very different than athletics opportunities for today's teenagers. Annamaria commented on her experiences at this age, and pointed to the greater emphasis placed on sports for adolescents today:

I did try out for teams in high school and played volleyball and basketball through high school. But we're talking—when I look at it now it's just not, it's not even anywhere close to the same thing. It wasn't like we were going for scholarships; it was because—it was fun.

Athletics clearly played an integral role in the participants' youth and adolescent years. They were passionate about sports and recreation from an early age, and their frequent involvement in such activities continued through junior high and high school. As is shown later in the chapter, their athletics experiences continued to their college years as well.

Educational preparation

Education has played a central role in the participants' career preparation. While taking part in athletics was certainly central to their desires to eventually becoming athletics directors, the participants spoke of the importance of education throughout their lives.

Margaret illustrated the importance of education in her family:

School was a big deal. It was because of, I think, my mom's involvement in athletics. There was always this kind of this background noise about achievement, and doing your best, and excellence, and not being lazy and working hard. Like I said, that was just kind of the background chatter in the house.

Undergraduate education and continued study at the graduate level have been valuable opportunities for participants to prepare for their careers. Since their chosen profession, intercollegiate athletics, exists within the context of higher education, it is imperative to realize the experiences participants had in their post-secondary educational pursuits.

College

The participants attended both small private institutions and larger public universities; they earned degrees in physical education, health and human performance, or comparable majors. Additionally, several earned teaching or coaching certificates, or minors in English or coaching. One participant earned a second degree in business administration, while

another earned two additional undergraduate degrees in history and sports medicine. Their exact programs of study varied, but all earned degrees in areas related to physical education. The participants' undergraduate experiences, including choosing their respective institutions, working toward baccalaureate degrees, and participating in intercollegiate athletics, were import aspects of their development and progression towards careers in athletics administration.

The college decision. While the opportunity to participate in athletics was at least a factor for most, their academic interests were of utmost importance. After taking a high school course with some emphasis on athletic training, Andrea desired to find an institution where she could prepare for a career in the field, which was a relatively new profession at the time. In recalling her college decision, she remarked:

When I was looking for colleges to go to and researching colleges, I was really looking at who had athletic training programs. So a lot of my decisions, as far as where to go, were who had that program and what opportunities would I have to stay in that field.

Annamaria was considering a career in education or physical therapy, so she chose a small private school that offered both of those opportunities. She would eventually choose physical education, but she wanted the option of both. Athletics was not part of her decision-making process:

I didn't have aspirations to play in college. I thought it would be nice, but it wasn't why I chose college. It wasn't a recruitment process, but I was recruited after I got to college and ended up playing.

Madison had plenty of options to play basketball at a high level, but her decision was largely based on academics rather than sports. Even though she changed her path once she

started taking classes, she initially chose her alma mater because of its strong academic reputation. She recalled the following:

I kind of thought I wanted to do landscape architecture. I kind of had an interest in that and this institution has a great landscape architecture program, so I thought that's what I might want to do. So that's kind of how I decided I'd go there. I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do.

While it was not the driving force in their decision making process, the opportunity to partake in intercollegiate athletics was a factor for many. A reputable athletic training program was the most important piece of her puzzle, but Andrea did desire to continue her athletics career:

Athletics was definitely a piece of it. Each institution that I looked at, I thought about if would I have the opportunity to play. And if I didn't, they weren't even on my top three. I never even would have looked at them.

In addition to Andrea, others also discussed the importance of athletics opportunities as they looked at college options. She would eventually play softball too, but after narrowing her list of colleges, basketball was the most important factor for Melanie:

My college decision really revolved around basketball. My three college choices were based on basketball because obviously, all three of them had great educational opportunities for me. But I don't think I would have been able to be as successful as I was if I didn't have my sports. So really, I was not able to have one without the other.

Undergraduate studies. Participants tended to consider a few professions or majors throughout their time in college. Madison began studies in landscape architecture, but it was not long before she changed majors to something better aligned with her interests. After learning that a physical education major would provide her opportunities *beyond* teaching physical education, she switched, and enjoyed her experiences from that point forward. Linda kept physical therapy in the back of her mind even though her institution did not offer

such a program. She desired to teach others about the importance of physical activity, and explained how her decision came to be:

I got my physical education degree, but part of that was because I wanted to teach something in physical education, not just roll out the ball. I wanted to teach the medical aspects. And you didn't have to have a medical degree to do that but I had enough understanding that this is why you should do this.

Like others who were unsure of a major or professional direction, Melanie had some uncertainty early in her college years. Describing this indecision, she said, “*I was prelaw; I was premed; I was going to be a journalist; I did all your stereotypical things.*” However, an encounter with her athletics director led her to become very focused on the goal of becoming a college athletics director herself: “*From the middle of my sophomore year on, it was ‘What do I do to get her job?’ And that’s really how it how it came to be.*” Unlike others, from her sophomore year in college, she knew this type of position was in her future.

While several participants experienced confusion in choosing majors and thinking about their future careers, Sue never waived from her interest to teach and coach at the college level. She prepared accordingly by earning a triple major: “*I always wanted to teach and coach.*”

Andrea chose her undergraduate institution primarily because of its strong athletic training program. She was required to earn 1,800 hours of work in athletic training, clearly playing a significant role in her undergraduate experience. While the required hours certainly provided applicable professional experience, she also discussed the liberal arts approach and the benefits provided for her career:

The liberal arts experience is not always about the subject matter of the class you are taking, but it is how to process the subject matter—how to incorporate that, how to think about it, how to reflect on it, how to write about it. It’s about the writing, it’s about the thinking, it’s about the reflection.

Annamaria concurred in regards to the liberal arts approach and the ways it prepared her for her career, commenting that her education “*just prepared me for a lot.*” Additionally, she talked about her close relationships with professors in the physical education department, stating that “*they were people who probably influenced me more than anybody else at that stage.*” Her undergraduate experience was positive, both from a curricular standpoint but also from a support perspective. These remarks illustrate her feelings well:

The fact that you're not trained for a particular job prepares you better for a management position or a communication situation, than just what a certain major would prepare you for. So I feel prepared educationally, more from being at a liberal arts school where people cared about the students and you were challenged and those kinds of things, versus just being in a degree “push you through” type of situation.

Participants talked about their undergraduate studies, and the learning they experienced outside the classroom. While she had good relationships with professors and felt prepared for her career, Madison also said, “*I learned a lot about myself.*” Margaret admitted that she “*learned how to drink beer and had myself a good time*” while experiencing “*an overdose of freedom*” in college. While her physical education degree prepared her for her next steps in life, she remarked, “*My undergraduate education was more about me learning about life than it was about preparing for the world, I think.*”

Experiences as college athletes. With the exception of Linda, the participants competed in intercollegiate athletics while earning their baccalaureate degrees. Attending college pre-Title IX, Linda did not have opportunities to compete in intercollegiate athletics until her fourth year, when the institution began sponsoring a women’s basketball team. Since she had not played basketball for three years, she opted not to participate on the newly formed intercollegiate team and “*just stuck with IM’s*” as she prepared for her career in

physical education.

The participants competed over a 25-year span and at varying pre-NCAA and NCAA levels, but all agreed that their experiences were vital steps in their progression towards careers in intercollegiate athletics. Some focused on one sport, while others were multi-sport athletes. Between them, the six women who participated in intercollegiate athletics competed in swimming, basketball, volleyball, softball, and tennis.

They likely had some similar experiences as student-athletes, but certainly had unique stories as well. Even though she hailed from a community with very successful girl's basketball, Madison was the first athlete from her high school to earn a Division I scholarship. Andrea's athletic training major only allowed her to play one varsity sport, so she played softball one year then gave it up for basketball, only to get her "*softball fix in the summer*" by playing in three recreational leagues. Melanie intended to play basketball in college, but ended up playing softball as well, in what she called "*a really big fluke*" and "*a weird twist of fate*" because softball is what led to her career in college athletics. Sue endured a knee injury her first season, but recovered to play in four straight NCAA tournaments, including a fifth place national finish.

Margaret gave up swimming after her junior year, when a chronic injury that continues to plague her, forced her to give up the sport she began when she was six. Swimming had been part of her livelihood forever and she had trouble leaving it behind. She explained it by stating, "*When I ended my swimming career, competitively of course, I didn't really go away. I hung out with the team and managed the team my senior year, just because I couldn't really leave it.*"

Annamaria's experience was unique to the participants, as she played basketball,

volleyball, and tennis. Attending college shortly after the passage of Title IX, her professors were her coaches and she used each sport to train for the next season. She explained the different focus on intercollegiate athletics during her career as a student-athlete:

It wasn't your life; it wasn't like you were just preparing for sports later or anything. It was just like—it was an opportunity. It wasn't dominating people's out of season time or anything like that. And it was just that activity was good for me and we didn't have to train for the other sport all year long.

Graduate school

In preparation for their respective careers, participants have all earned Master's degrees. While their degrees vary between Master of Arts (MA), Master of Education (MEd), and Master of Science (MS), their curricula were related to sport. The participants had earned Master's degrees in physical education, athletics administration, kinesiology, and exercise physiology. Additionally, four women have continued beyond their Master's degree; one earned a Master of Business Administration (MBA), one earned 30 hours beyond her Master's, one is working toward an EdD in leadership, and one earned a certificate from the Sports Management Institute.

Some participants earned their Master's degrees as fulltime students, while others had fulltime positions in athletics while earning their Master's degrees on the side. Andrea pursued her Master's while completing an assistantship in athletic training. Sue took a similar route, although her assistantships were in coaching and health and wellness. While their coursework was valuable because of the narrowed focus on their interests, they pointed to their assistantships as opportunities to gain immediate hands-on professional experience. Sue has been pleased with her education preparation and the route she has taken, but did

mention curriculum now available to aspiring athletics administrators. She spoke of such preparation for careers in athletics:

I had one sport administration class and I had a little bit of budget work in that. But really, now as you look where sports administration is at today, from a curricular standpoint, it's far more advanced than what I had available to me at the time. But I do think the structure and the critical thinking and the organization of thought and thoroughness of thought, has been something that's helped me throughout my whole career.

For those who earned Master's degrees while working fulltime jobs, summers were often opportunities to take heavy course loads. Regardless of the approach to earning their advanced degrees, the participants indicated that their graduate degrees were important steps in their professional development.

Annamaria discussed the challenges she faced in working fulltime as a college coach, while working toward her Master's degree: *"I started it right away and I was coaching and it is hard to focus on academics and do research and do the things you should do."* She acknowledged that she might have done it differently if given another chance to do so: *"I have a degree and I'm proud of my degree, but it wasn't the perfect way to do it."*

Madison also attended graduate school while working fulltime in college athletics. In taking classes at this time, she was able to immediately apply lessons in the classroom to her positions in athletics. In addition to this practical application, she enhanced her ability to balance multiple tasks at once. She explained this challenging balance when she stated, "I think probably the biggest thing is in order to be successful in school you had to be organized and that's clearly part of being a successful AD is having organization, being able to manage multiple tasks."

When she began to think seriously about becoming an athletics director, Margaret

decided to earn an MBA in a program that was very much geared toward management positions. When speaking of her educational preparation, she commented that her Bachelor's and Master's in kinesiology prepared her for coaching, while the MBA prepared her for the athletics director position. She explained the focus of her MBA studies:

I think that the only part of the education that had anything to do with the actual day to day of this job has been business school. My business school program was more management based; some programs are more finance based; some are more entrepreneurial based. This one was more management based and so for me the most interesting classes were those that dealt with motivating and managing large groups.

Melanie is the only participant currently working on a doctorate, but others have considered earning additional degrees beyond their Master's. Linda has earned 30 credits beyond her Master's; Annamaria began work on an MBA, but was forced to stop out because of her rigorous work schedule. Two others have considered working toward doctoral degrees; neither has closed the door to potentially doing so in the future. Margaret, who has earned two Master's degrees, made an interesting comment in regards to doctoral work in preparation for an athletics director position:

I think that having a PhD in this job is completely unnecessary. I think that the reasons to have a PhD are if you want to do research or you want to be a college professor—period. And I think if you want to be a college athletic administrator, I think having a PhD is a waste of time.

Participants' approaches to, and opinions of, graduate school differ. Nevertheless, they clearly value the attainment of advanced degrees, especially because of their work within the context of higher education. In addition to their pursuit of degrees, several participants were quick to point out their natural inquisitiveness and desire to be life-long learners. Linda said, *"I would be a fulltime student if I could—if they would pay me to go to school. I do enjoy going to school and learning."*

Career pathways

The participants' childhood experiences, involvement in athletics, and educational preparation set the wheels in motion for their respective careers in intercollegiate athletics. As shown previously in this chapter, athletics played significant roles throughout the participants' various pre-career life stages. In explaining their respective career paths, emerging themes centered on their entries into careers in college athletics, previous work experiences, and preparation for athletics director positions.

Entry into college athletics

With the exception of Linda, who worked in secondary education for several years prior to her career in intercollegiate athletics, the participants began working in various areas of college athletics within a few years of graduating from college. Their entry points and experiences ranged, but most began as graduate assistants or part-time athletics employees.

Andrea, Margaret, and Annamaria began their athletics careers as part-time coaches. While student teaching in her fifth year of college, Andrea became an assistant basketball coach at her alma mater. When she landed a fulltime position as an athletic trainer within a hospital setting, she continued to serve in that coaching role on the side. She would later serve as a graduate assistant athletic trainer and assistant softball coach at another institution, before eventually landing her first fulltime position in college athletics. In all, Andrea served in part-time capacities within college athletics for six years before she earned her first fulltime position as a head athletics trainer. As the first fulltime athletic trainer at the institution, the same institution in which she served as their graduate assistant, she recalled not receiving much guidance from day one:

My first day on the job, I walked in and the athletic director at that time, gave me my keys and said “Here you go.” No orientation to the college, no “Okay you’re going to have a meeting with HR, you’re going to have a meeting with this person.” It was just like “Okay here you go.”

Margaret’s entry into college athletics was also in a part-time role, but as head swimming coach for a college near her hometown. After not knowing what she wanted to do after college and working in a few “custodian kinds of odd jobs and waitressing,” she received a phone call about the coaching position. A family friend, who worked in athletics at the college, had heard Margaret was back in town and thought she may be interested in the position. The coaching position was part-time and paid \$4,000, so she supplemented her income with waitressing. She remained in this part-time position for seven years, before exploring possibilities elsewhere. Her newfound coaching position was elevated to fulltime after one year. In describing her eventual move a fulltime position, she said:

I’m slow to learn things I guess. I woke up one day and was like, “They’re never going to give me a fulltime coaching job. I’ve got to go elsewhere; I’ve got to look for something else.” So that summer I looked at a whole bunch of different places and applied a whole bunch of different places.

Annamaria was hired as the basketball coach at a university in hometown, although she also served as the assistant director of student activities and became the volleyball coach, too. The basketball program had started just four years previously and she was hired by the previous coach, who was also the director of student activities, to take his place. After three years of split time between athletics and student activities, she earned a fulltime position in the athletics department. She recalled her initial experience in college athletics:

I took a job as a basketball coach primarily. I was 21 and I had no experience. And I also became the assistant director of student activities because I worked for the man who was giving up the women’s coaching position. I became his assistant at the time to make a few more dollars, I guess. Because I had no experience. Talk about no experience coaching and

no experience with that either.

Sue and Melanie both had opportunities as graduate assistants immediately following college. After spending two years as graduate assistant coaches, they both immediately earned fulltime coaching positions in their respective sports. Sue gained valuable coaching experience right out of college, while serving as a basketball graduate assistant for two years at a Division I program. Her experience under a very successful head coach proved beneficial, as immediately following graduate school she earned her first fulltime job in college athletics, as an assistant coach at a Division II institution.

To get a jumpstart on her coaching career while she completed her double major, Melanie was a student assistant coach for her alma mater's softball team. This led to a graduate assistant position for a Division II program, where she served as the top assistant coach. After gaining important experience as a graduate assistant for two years, she landed her first fulltime position in college athletics, a Division III head softball coach position at the age of 25. Although her youth did not faze her at the time, she explained the value as she hires young staff members. She stated, "*So now when I'm hiring and I see somebody who's 25, I go 'Wow, they are really young.' But it's helpful to have that experience and to see that.*"

Madison was the only participant to gain a fulltime position in college athletics immediately following college. After interviewing for a few positions in high school teaching and health club management, she interviewed for a head volleyball and basketball position at a Division III college. She recalled the experience:

At end of the day, before I left I sat down with the AD and they offered me the job. So the whole thing happened, I didn't even know what I wanted to do, I didn't know what I wanted to be and then it was like "Okay this is great."

Linda took a different route than the others, as she worked in secondary education for 17 years prior to her entry into college athletics. She had coached high school volleyball and softball for many years, and then was presented with an opportunity to continue coaching both at a Division III college. In her first year in college athletics, she was the head volleyball coach, indoor track and softball assistant coach, and instructor of physical education.

Coaching

Regardless of their respective paths to administrative positions, the participants all spent significant time in the coaching ranks as student assistants, graduate assistants, volunteer assistants, fulltime assistants, and head coaches. Many were assistant coaches at some point, all served as head coach for at least two years, while others were head coaches for as many as 10 to 20 years. Most women coached multiple sports in their tenures; together, the seven women coached basketball, volleyball, softball, indoor track, and swimming. They point to their coaching experiences as vital to their preparation and effectiveness as athletics directors. As former coaches who have “been in their shoes,” athletics directors indicated that their hands-on experience allows them to more appropriately administrate over coaches. Alluding to this, Annamaria said, *“I think that if you are going to work with coaches, if you haven’t been in it at all, it is hard.”*

Participants talked about the numerous duties they had as coaches, which forced them to be exceptionally organized. Assistant coaches and support staff were uncommon for most; therefore coaches handled nearly all responsibilities related to their programs’ operations. Recalling those days, Madison said, *“I just did everything. I set up the gym; I did the tape.”*

On top of the day-to-day operations of the program, the participants noted that coaching a team of student-athletes was good preparation for their current duty of supervising their coaching staffs. In many ways they still consider themselves coaches, but rather than coaching student-athletes, they coach their coaches. They coached their student-athletes to work hard toward a common goal, which they continue to do with their athletics department staff members. Margaret described the similarities of managing student-athletes and coaches:

Coaching is often times herding cats. You have to get 50 kids on the same page, on the same day, at the same time, doing the same thing --- and all toward the common goal. There is always one or two that are out scurrying around and you've got to keep your arms around most of them, while you are out trying to get the other two back in. And it's a little bit that way with these guys (coaches) too. Because they all have their thing that they really, really want to do and they really, really think is important to do and it's really the passion for them.

Participants noted the importance of strong relationships between athletics directors and their coaches. As former coaches who understand the daily grind and demands of the profession, athletics directors can look to their own coaching experiences as reference points. In addition, coaches seem to respond well knowing that their athletics directors really do understand their vantage point. Melanie spoke of the value in her coaching background:

I can't imagine being in the position that I am now, without having been in the coaching ranks at some point. It's very valuable to me. So I can look --- I just sat with our baseball coach today and he was talking with me about some concerns that he had and I'm able to draw from my experience, rather than go "Well, what I read was..." That's important to me.

Sue echoed the sentiments regarding the ability to relate to coaches, as a result of her coaching experience. As an assistant and head basketball coach in Divisions I, II, and III for

16 years, she has experienced many circumstances which help her interactions with personnel. She explained the perspective she attempts to maintain with her coaching staff:

Being a coach and having been in the trenches for 16 years, so to speak, I think it's made me a better administrator. All the time I say to myself—don't ever forget what it's like to pull into your driveway at two in the morning, to have that last-second shot get drained at the buzzer and either win or lose, to lose a recruit, to gain a really prolific recruit to your roster. I always talk about the highs are high, the lows are low—there's so few in between and I think it's important that you are really attentive to the flow of your coaching staff.

Athletics directors discussed the value in their coaching experience, as it is a very unique profession that outsiders often do not understand. Without having been coaches, they explained it would be very difficult to work with and meet the needs of their own coaches.

Margaret explained the uniqueness of the coaching profession:

It's understanding that coaches have passions about their sport that kind of don't really exist in any other world. I don't think CPAs love tax day. I think they are really smart about tax laws and accounting, and so that is what they do for their job. But I don't know that all of them have the passion about creating something that's outstanding, every single day that coaches do. And unless you have walked a little bit of a mile in that life, I think it hard to get it. So from that perspective too it's important to have some coaching.

While the participants spoke at length about the importance of their coaching experiences because of their enhanced ability to manage their athletics departments, they also recalled times when they had to think on their feet and troubleshoot. They valued the opportunity to take unfamiliar circumstances and, in the best interest of their student-athletes and athletics department, make the most of the situation. Linda laughed when she recollected an experience when she was asked to be an assistant indoor track coach for a season. “My track knowledge was probably ‘Turn left at the curve,’ ” she said while laughing.

Madison talked about a similar experience coaching volleyball, a sport she had not played since high school. After a “crash course” from the volleyball coach at her sister’s college, much of her knowledge was self-taught via books on the sport. She recalled times when she deferred her athletes’ questions until she could find the information in a coaching book. She described the experience:

There would be days in practice they would ask me a question. Here I am 21 years old and they ask a volleyball question. I’d be like “We’re not going over that today. We are going over it tomorrow.” And I’d go and look in my books, because I didn’t even know what the answer was sometimes.

The participants were adamant that athletics administrators, at least those who oversee teams and coaches, should have some coaching experience. Managing employees, particularly coaches, is a significant aspect of their duties as athletics directors; therefore, their ability to relate to coaches is invaluable and completely necessary. Sue summed up the importance of her coaching experiences well:

The day when I lose focus or perspective on those aspects of being having been a coach and what it takes to be a coach in these days—when I lose that perspective then I need to be thinking about another occupation. I do think it’s helped me a lot, and I think it helps give merit to the people that I work with.

Transition to administration

When transitioning to positions in athletics administration, the participants were typically approached by their institution’s administration and asked to move up into management positions, most often as assistant or associate athletics director. Many desired to eventually move into administration positions at some point in their careers and were quick to jump at the opportunity; others were surprised to be considered for such promotions and mulled over the decision.

Margaret is a good example of someone who did not expect the promotion after serving two years, one year each of part-time and fulltime, as head swimming coach at her second institution. At the time, she was the only fulltime woman in the department and the new athletics director desired a greater balance on his staff. Her reaction to the idea was amusing:

*And so the college at that point asked me to be an assistant athletic director. And I was like, “I know **nothing** about what you are asking me to do. I mean are you serious? Are you sure? Are you crazy? Is there some ulterior motive that I don’t know about?”*

Andrea was preparing to exit college athletics when an administration opportunity presented itself. The long hours and demands of athletic training had taken a toll and she was ready for something new, but a career in athletics administration was not something she had previously considered. After serving as the head athletics trainer for 10 years, including four years in which she was either head or assistant softball coach simultaneously, she faced a considerable case of burnout. She had been accepted into a physician assistant (PA) program, and planned to leave college athletics behind. The women’s athletics director had announced her retirement and the provost, who oversees athletics at the institution, approached Andrea about the administrative vacancy. She eventually accepted the position as associate director of women’s athletics, and then progressed to director of women’s athletics the following year. Although she did accept the administrative position, she recalled the uncertainty she faced:

Do I completely make a transition, go PA...or do I get into administration? I never really thought about it. I love working at the college level, but I was just burned out. I was just really burned out. I really consulted with a lot of friends, a lot of colleagues, and a lot of people whose opinions I trusted and respected. Several of them said, “You can always go back to school.” But this

is an opportunity that if you don't take it, you'll never know if this is something you would like to do.

The transition to administration typically meant that participants dropped some of their other responsibilities, such as coaching or other duties. Annamaria was the head basketball and volleyball coach and the assistant director of student activities when she transitioned to a position that was fulltime in athletics, as assistant athletics director. As a result of her new responsibilities as assistant athletics director, she gave up volleyball, but continued to coach basketball for another seven years. As her administrative duties continued to grow with the NCAA taking over women's sports, Annamaria eventually decided to give up basketball and focus solely on her administrative responsibilities, resulting in a pay cut. She described the struggle with her supervisor during that time:

When I went into my boss he said, "Well I can't guarantee that you're going to have a position, if you're not going to coach." And I said, "Well you know I can't do it anymore like this." So for three months I waited until anyone told me if I would be able to retain my job in any way, shape, or form.

Andrea had to put her foot down in similar fashion, as the institution's administration desired for her to remain as head athletic trainer while taking on administrative duties.

Already facing a serious case of burnout, she recalled a blunt conversation that took place:

They were thinking I was going to take over her role and still be the head athletic trainer, and I said, "No, not happening. You are going to need to hire another fulltime athletic trainer and this is kind of the pay scale that I would need in order to stay here. I've got this opportunity; I'm at the point in my career that I don't want to go backwards. I'm burned-out and if you can't meet this, then I just need to make a change." And so he came back and he did, and we hired another fulltime athletic trainer.

Linda gave up coaching volleyball, but continued to coach softball when she moved into an administration position. She had a unique transition to administration; her athletics director's side job as an NFL official sent him out of town Friday through Sunday every fall,

leaving her to oversee all competitions on those days. While it was frenetic at times, she appreciated the new opportunity and challenge. She remembered that time:

For me it might have been good, maybe not for the institution. I learned a lot by just trial and error—some good things, some things not so good. So if I had more of a mentor, because I started out in administration right off the bat in the fall, in your biggest sports. Football, even though it's Division III, it's not just game management. It's all the PR that you have to do with football and basketball, too. I would have probably done better, but I learned what worked and what didn't right off the bat.

Unlike those who were promoted to administration positions from within the organization, Sue took a coaching position at another institution because of the administrative duties that accompanied the job. In addition to her coaching duties, she was the assistant athletic director of business affairs and held the SWA designation:

It was a really tremendous transition for me, in terms of being a Division II head basketball coach. But I really was driven to that position, distinctly because it gave me an opportunity to go into the administrative area of work.

The participants had similar experiences in moving into administrative positions. They were typically promoted from within their respective departments and in most cases some of their other duties or positions were removed from their job descriptions. Whether they were surprised by the promotion opportunities or anticipated them eventually, their entries into athletics administration were important steps in their progressions to athletics director positions. As the only participant who never served as an assistant or associate athletics director, Madison had different experiences in regards to her entrance into administration. Her transition to administration is included in the following section, which describes the participants' ascents to athletics director positions.

Climbing the ladder

The participants had similarities in their respective ascents to athletics director positions, but of course there were unique circumstances to those ascensions as well. As shown previously, coaching experience played significant roles in their career paths and preparation. All agreed that their coaching experiences were vital in their administrative preparation. For most, time spent in an assistant or associate athletics role was part of the process as well. Their years in supportive administrative roles were opportunities to learn about the various facets of their respective departments' operations, giving them hands-on experience which would prepare them for oversight responsibilities. Like many of their entries to administrative roles, some were promoted within their institutions for athletics director positions; others transitioned to different institutions when becoming athletics directors. Regardless of the circumstances and their respective paths, their journeys prepared them to lead their organizations.

Andrea is an example of someone who progressed through the ranks at the same institution, moving from head athletics trainer, to associate director of women's athletics, to director of women's athletics, and then finally to athletics director. While she was the director of women's athletics, her athletics department had a unique administrative structure; there was a director for men's athletics, as well as the department chair for physical education. Andrea explained the challenges associated with this structure, which eventually led to her promotion to the athletics director position:

It created a lot of issues. It created a lot of problems. It was very tense between the three of us, because we had no idea who had the final say. And neither of us did, really. We all had to collaborate and communication really struggled.

In an attempt to alleviate some of their administrative struggles, Andrea's institution completed an external review of the athletics department. In this process, which brought consulting athletics directors to campus, it was determined that one athletics director would be the appropriate administrative model. The men's athletics director has an opportunity elsewhere, so Andrea was promoted to the athletics director position. Although there were challenges in her three years at the women's athletics director, she pointed to several important learning opportunities. The Equity in Athletics Data Analysis (EADA) report, NCAA reports, as well as oversight of all women's sports, were large tasks that prepared her well for the position of athletics director.

Melanie was also promoted to athletics director from within her institution. While she had been gearing her career toward eventually becoming an athletics director, the opportunity to step into the position came earlier than expected. She had spent six years at the institution as head softball coach, but had only served as assistant athletics director and SWA for two of those years. Although she gave up coaching softball, she was excited about the new opportunity. In addition to her coaching experience, she cited facilities oversight, supervision of students, budget work, and fundraising as vital preparation for her new position. She described her experience in deciding to take on the new challenge of athletics director:

Through a series of events our athletic director became the vice president of student development here. So I said, "Obviously yes I am going to interview for this position." I did, and was fortunate enough to be chosen for the position. I had many of my coaching peers say, "You are crazy. You've got a good softball thing going on. Why do you want to deal with us and the administration part of it, when you can be on the field coaching and doing those things?" But I'm a firm believer that you have to take advantage of opportunities when they come to you.

After serving in various administrative roles, some participants opted to pursue athletics director positions at other institutions. Margaret, Sue, Linda, and Annamaria moved to different colleges when stepping into the athletics director chair. Annamaria had worked in Division I athletics, at two institutions, her entire professional career. Serving in positions of assistant, associate, and senior associate athletics director, while also holding the SWA designation, she had a wealth of experience in intercollegiate athletics administration. As she thought about continuing her career, she considered her next step. Changes in university administration and a desire to be closer to family were both significant factors in her decision to leave, as well as her personal career path. She recalled that time:

There was part of me that said, "There will never be an AD in this league who's a woman," but there was another part of me that said, "What they do, that's not what I want." Yeah part of it was, can you go to the next level? What's your next step? If you're not going to be comfortable here for the long term, what is the next step? I was a senior associate so I knew that it was the next step.

For those who continued to coach while serving as assistant or associate athletics directors, they gave up coaching when becoming athletics directors. This transition was harder for some than others, but Margaret spoke of her desire to exit the coaching profession while searching for athletics director positions. She described her thought process at the time:

I again woke up one day and was like, "I need to put my name out there. I need to talk to some people and figure out how I'm going to be the AD somewhere—because I need to be done coaching swimming. And I need to be done doing 85 jobs at a time. And I need to be done recruiting." Because that was really the part of my job that I was just like, "Ahh, get me out of recruiting." And the rest, as they say, is history.

Madison is the only participant who bypassed assistant and associate athletics director positions en route to becoming an athletics director. After coaching basketball and volleyball

for six years, she was promoted to athletics director at the age of 28. The vacancy was advertised as head football coach and athletics director, so she did not initially apply for the position. When the search committee had trouble negotiating with top candidates, they offered the position to Madison because she had been very successful in her time at the college. After realizing that she had the full support of the president, search committee, campus community, and athletics department, she accepted the position. Similar to other participants dropping some of their other duties, Madison gave up coaching volleyball; she then focused exclusively on her duties as athletics director and head basketball coach. In discussing her career path to becoming an athletics director, and how it was different than most, she said: *“So I had no path. The path now is choosing to stay. And in this path is a little more of the decision.”*

Professional relationships

Mentoring and networking relationships have played important roles in the participants' career paths, from their early years in the profession to present day. As they progressed through the professional ranks, athletics directors relied on mentors for guidance and advice. As their careers continued and they gained significant experience in college athletics, their communication with colleagues served more for networking purposes.

“Through the years, I think you just find the people that you trust,” Madison said in reference to the importance of such professional relationships. Melanie also referred to the value and impact of professional relationships:

I really believe you are a product of everybody you have been associated with. Whether they are a negative influence or a positive influence, they are an influence on you. You get to take a lot of those things with you.

Being mentored

The participants had varying experiences with mentors throughout their development as intercollegiate athletics professionals. Although their experiences being mentored have been both similar and different, participants pointed to the importance of such relationships. These relationships provided the participants with practical information about their work and professions; many of these mentors were especially valuable because of the overall support they offered the participants.

Participating athletics directors often referred to high school and college coaches as important role models and mentors. They learned valuable lessons through their coaches; many credited them for influencing their decisions to pursue careers in athletics. Although these influential people interacted with them before their careers in college athletics, the participants noted their importance and influence. Some women continue to remain in contact with their coaches and consider them important contacts as they continue their careers as athletics directors.

A few women pointed to their parents as professional mentors, as they had skills or knowledge related to their daughters' work in college athletics. Margaret's mother was a very successful club swimming coach who highly valued education. Sue's parents were entrepreneurs; their knowledge and experience of running a successful business was helpful in Sue's early administrative positions. Andrea's father provided important mentoring when she transitioned to administrative work. His support was particularly important because she otherwise did not receive mentoring from higher ranking athletics administrators in her department. She explained the role he played:

My Dad was a mentor. He was in business, so when I started here we talked almost every other day because he was dealing with personnel, and policies, and procedures, and risk management. So I really called my Dad a lot.

The participants spoke of mentors who were influential in their careers, although at the time they may not have realized the impact these people had. High school and college coaches, coaches she worked under, and athletics directors she worked for along the way, are all people Sue would now consider to have been mentors. She may not have realized their influence at the time, but now values their impact:

I think these were all people that you really look to as mentors, and as teachers, and people you looked up to. I don't think that at the time I was exactly defining them as my network or my mentors, but I knew I was gaining a tremendous amount of influence and perspective.

As a result of her background in athletic training, Andrea's circumstances were a bit different than most. She pointed to several members of the athletic training community as mentors, such as her undergraduate and graduate program directors, as well as the other athletic trainers in her institution's conference. As a result of her focus on athletic training, she faced some challenges when she transitioned to administration. Unfortunately, she did not receive mentoring from athletics administrators above her, but she eventually found some mentoring relationships through a professional organization and women who were administrators within her league. She explained why she craved mentoring relationships at that point in her career:

I came in from the athletic training ranks and really had no clue, other than seeing some athletic administrators, what I was getting into at that point and time. There's a lot more that goes on to the job than just what you see on a day to day level, and going to the games and that type of stuff. The politics and the higher education administration politics, and dealing with budgets and personnel and HR issues really took me by surprise.

When Annamaria began her career, she was mentored by the director of student activities, who was her supervisor at the time. Even though he did not work in athletics, she valued his teachings and applied them to her volleyball and basketball coaching positions, as well as to her future career in administration. When she eventually moved to a different institution, she was mentored by her athletics director. She spoke of their strong working relationship: *“We worked well together; he was about as opposite of strengths as there could be and that was why he hired me, I ultimately figured out. So we complimented each other very well.”* In addition to her athletics director, she had the opportunity to be mentored by female colleagues in her conference. Other than her high school and college coaches, it was the first time Annamaria had been mentored by women. She valued those relationships immensely: *“Some of these women are the strongest women I have ever been around.”*

Just as Annamaria received mentoring from the director of student activities, other participants noted mentoring relationships with persons from other departments on their respective campuses. Margaret said, *“My mentoring has come in a bunch of weird little ways and I’ve kind of pieced it together on my own.”* In reference to this, she pointed to athletics administrators and faculty members at her previous institution. When speaking of the lessons learned from faculty and other campus personnel, she said, *“Maybe not mentoring in terms of the purely athletic part of the job, but how to be a good college community member.”* Madison also pointed to mentoring relationships with a variety of constituencies:

I think I had a lot of role models that helped me define who I was. And then after I got my job, I found those people who helped me figure out how to be successful at my job. And it was random people, like a financial aid guy, our VP for business, a colleague of mine in coaching, just kind of different people like that.

The participants had varied opportunities to be mentored by women. Margaret's only female mentor was her mother; others had influential women to serve as mentors, but to varying degrees. Linda did not receive mentoring from co-workers, male or female, early in her career, but she did develop a mentoring relationship with a female colleague at a nearby Division I institution. Melanie pointed to her college coach and athletics director, both of whom are women, as mentors she remains in contact with today. She also continues to have a valuable relationship with the female head coach during her time as a graduate assistant. As mentioned previously, Annamaria's first mentoring relationships with female colleagues came late in her career.

Andrea and Sue both pointed to significant mentoring relationships with several women, particularly because of their involvement in NACWAA (National Association of Collegiate Women Athletics Administrators). While Andrea had valuable mentoring relationships with female colleagues from within her institution's conference, Sue had no female mentors other than those she met through NACWAA. Data related to the participants' involvement in, and viewpoints of, professional organizations such as NACWAA are presented later in this chapter.

Regardless of who served in these guiding roles, the participants reported that mentoring relationships, of various extents, have been important in their respective professional development. Most athletics directors had a core group of people they turned to for advice or support. Madison talked about these prevailing relationships: *"Even today I look back and the same people—and you get new people you add to that list—but I still talk to some of the same people I talked to when I first became the AD."* Like she said, these professional relationships continue to be important in present day, although they tend to be

more for networking, rather than mentoring. This information is provided in the following section.

Networking with others

Once participants gained experience in intercollegiate athletics administration, their contacts with colleagues have served more for networking purposes than mentoring. Networking exists in many forms, such as serving on NCAA committees, attending conventions, and remaining in contacting with colleagues via email or telephone. Regardless of the approaches utilized, participants noted that like mentoring early in their careers, networking with colleagues is beneficial and necessary. Speaking of the importance of these relationships, Linda said the following:

I think they have been very important, just knowing there is someone there that can be a sounding board. Most likely, you'll talk to at least one, two, or three that have been through very similar situations. They give you a different light on "Well this is my situation here and this is what you need to take into account." So you take all of that and apply it to your situation and hope you can make the best of decision that you can.

Madison echoed Linda's sentiments, stating she has a core group she calls in times of need. She has known these individuals for many years and feels comfortable and confident in confiding in them: *"I think you find your group of people that you trust. I think that's important. If I am struggling with any decisions, I can tell you which two or three people I am going to call."*

The participants noted it is particularly important to have other athletics directors with whom they network. While other colleagues within athletics are valuable, only athletics directors can truly understand each other's pressures, stressors, and issues. Margaret explained the value of maintaining relationships with others: *"I think very important. I rely*

on my own little network to give me all kinds of information.” Margaret later continued to discuss the importance of gaining others’ viewpoints:

I think that to try to do this job without input from other people is --- we in athletics often use the phrase, “There’s no sense in reinventing the wheel.” If we all didn’t rely on each other, boy we would have many wheels out there. A lot of which would look very identical.

When participants spoke of their desires to network specifically with other athletics directors, they did not specify a preference to network with men or women in these roles. “*I think both genders certainly have a lot to bring to the table and I think in the world of intercollegiate athletics, if you don’t pay attention to both genders I think you are doing yourself a huge disservice,*” said Margaret. Linda agreed with Margaret’s sentiment:

I haven’t really made it a point to reach out strictly to females. I reach out, whether male or female, to individuals that I think can help me, give me another perspective on a situation, or can give me guidance. It’s whomever I feel that can help me the most, and what’s available.

Melanie also spoke of her desire to develop and rely on relationships with athletics directors, both men and women. She highly values opportunities to learn from, and gain ideas from colleagues. Although she is an athletics director, she continues to view these relationships as mentoring and learning opportunities. The importance of such relationships is a key to her development:

I think networking with other female athletic directors is important, but for me overall it’s just networking with athletic directors in general. And so male or female, I’m trying to make a connection; trying to learn from other people; trying to get ideas from other people. So yeah I think connections are important, connections to other women athletic directors are important—but just connections to athletic directors, in general, is more important.

While Sue has developed many key networking relationships with women through NACWAA, she also values several male colleagues’ opinions and knowledge. As others

stated, she finds these opportunities crucial to her ability to serve her institution well. She spoke of such networking relationships:

It's important when you are sitting in a director's role to have really good colleagues with whom you can share ideas and bounce things off of. I would say I have colleagues that are both male and female that I would look at as being incredible valuable.

Although Annamaria had nearly 30 years of intercollegiate athletics experience when she took over as athletics director, she found it important to network specifically with those in Division III. This was challenging at first, as most of her networking contacts existed within Division I. She spoke of her desire to network with, and learn from, athletics directors specifically in Division III:

Despite being maybe more experienced than many people because I have been in this business a long time, I think when moving to Division III there was a learning curve for sure, in terms of anything from the rules, to different perspectives, to what the recruiting process—all those kinds of things were different. You have to adapt to that and certainly the way other people do things is helpful.

While the participants noted that networking is primarily for learning and gaining insight from others in the field, these relationships also serve as important support systems. Athletics directors responded that professional relationships have developed into close friendships. Working in intercollegiate athletics requires unique sacrifices and passion, which is best understood by others in the profession. Annamaria spoke of this:

Besides the learning factor, which I think is true with all networking; I think that is as important from a personal validation/social kind of non-work discussions—as anything else. Just because those people are the people who understand who you are and what you have been doing and frankly that's where a lot of my friends are.

Madison has also developed close friendships with others in the field, and noted the value of networking relationships for a variety of reasons. She spoke of the added perspective such relationships can provide:

You get caught up on the day-to-day of what you do every day and you always feel like you've got issues and problems. But when you go to networking things, you get out and you listen, and I think it puts your specific situations in perspective. And what you come to realize I think a lot, is that it sort of reaffirms either that you're really at a good place, or you've got a really good job, or there's that feeling that "Okay everyone else is facing the same issues I am"—that kind of thing. So I think networking is good for professional health, development, your psyche.

Involvement in professional organizations

The participants have had varying degrees of involvement in professional organizations. While they may be involved in other organizations such as NACDA (National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics), NADIII AA (National Association of Division III Athletic Administrators), or coaching organizations for the sports they once coached, NACWAA was the only organization participants mentioned as playing a significant role in their mentoring and networking opportunities.

While others have attended a few conventions but otherwise have not been active in NACWAA, Andrea and Sue have been very involved in this organization. Both women pointed to NACWAA for providing important mentoring and networking opportunities. Sue explained the great significance of this organization for her development of professional relationships:

From the day that I heard of it and the day that I went to my first NACWAA/HERS week-long training session—from that day my life changed, in terms of having confidence in my administrative skills and having some vision. A lot of things came forward that week that were just terrific. Ever since then I've been a very significant part of NACWAA and now serve on

their faculty to teach. I have just enjoyed the mentors and the people, the colleagues I've been able to meet at that level.

Andrea also attended a NACWAA/HERS leadership institute, which led to the development of many professional relationships. The women she has met through NACWAA have been important players in her administrative career, and she continues to network with them often. She explained the support these women have provided since her transition to administration:

Without making those connections, without having gone to NACWAA/HERS initially and getting some confidence and creating some cohorts that I was comfortable being able to call and say "What do I do here? I've got this situation, this is how I think I'm going to handle it, what do you think?" Boy, I don't know what I would have done. Having those opportunities and having those phone numbers and e-mails has been crucial to me in these last four or five years. I just couldn't see myself being where I am, at the level I am, without having had those contacts and those networking opportunities.

Sue stated that if not for her involvement, she would not have had mentoring and networking opportunities with women. However, since she has been very involved in this organization, she has had many valuable mentoring and networking relationships with other women in intercollegiate athletics administration. She spoke of the emphasis NACWAA places on developing professional relationships with other women:

I think one of the things that the NACWAA organization does the absolute best is really to talk about how critical it is to network, and how important it is to be supportive of one another and to share ideas. And to be able to talk to colleagues about things that you maybe are facing and how maybe they've worked through some of the same scenarios. It's been an incredibly major player for me in terms of my development.

While NACWAA has played an imperative role in the professional development for Sue and Andrea, others had mixed reviews of this organization and its philosophies. Some participants mentioned the inconvenient timing of NACWAA conventions, held annually in

the fall, as an inhibitor to them becoming involved. As Linda said, *“They moved their conventions to the fall and I can never get away in the fall. It’s always on a football weekend.”* Melanie mentioned that attendance at conventions provides good networking opportunities for some, but she prefers other forms of networking: *“I think the conventions—NACWAA/NACDA—those things are okay, they are good, and certainly there are some networking opportunities through them. But it’s not necessarily what works for me.”*

During her long coaching career, Madison was often unable to attend conventions. Since exiting the coaching ranks two years ago, she has attended the last two NACWAA conventions. Although she cannot always attend conventions of professional organizations, she stays up to date on important issues. Although she has not been terribly active in the past, she explained her level of involvement:

I belong to every organization and I read their stuff. I feel like if I can’t go to the things, I wanted to make sure that I was well versed in the magazines, the newsletters. I pretty much know what’s going on in all the topics.

In addition to some having very positive experiences with this professional organization, some participants do not agree with NACWAA and its philosophies toward professional development and women in intercollegiate athletics administration. Margaret has not chosen to become involved in this organization:

I’ve never been to NACWAA/HERS. I don’t really have any great desire to go. And I think it’s because of the whole “girl power/we can only do it if we are together” thing, because I’m not sure that I really believe all that. And maybe I am completely missing the point and that is entirely possible.

Linda has attended NACWAA in the past, but scheduling conflicts and her overall view of the organization’s ideals have kept her from returning in recent years. She referred to her perceived conflict with the group:

For a few years I participated in NACWAA, I haven't for quite awhile. For awhile I felt like they were just going so far off to the left. I'm like, "You guys, this is this is the real world. We've got to work together."

Margaret also stated that she feels as though some women in NACWAA only network and build professional relationships with other women. She is a firm believer that networking should exist among men and women, which she does not perceive to be in line with NACWAA's viewpoint. In reference to networking exclusively with women, she remarked:

I think that's a mistake that a lot of woman make—that that's the only way. So the whole NACWAA/HERS, the whole women together and it's the only way, and you can't learn anything from men, bugs me kind of a lot. And I think there's a raging mistrust of male athletic administrators from women, and that really bothers me because they are not all bad and they're not all out to get us.

Regardless of how they have interacted with colleagues for mentoring and networking, the participants agreed that such relationships have been, and continue to be, vital to their careers. Now that the participants' background experiences in athletics and education have been delved into, the following section explores their current experiences as Division III athletics directors.

Why Do They Stay?

As the previous segment explained how participants arrived at their current positions, this section centers on the participants' current circumstances related to their positions as female athletics directors in NCAA Division III. Their duties and responsibilities, busy work schedules, impact of gender, and thoughts on Division III athletics, are themes that emerged through data analysis. These four areas help to understand why participants serve in their current positions.

All in a day's work

When speaking to the participants about their work, they pointed to the variety of tasks completed daily. Throughout a typical day, athletics directors attend several meetings, both within the athletics department and among other campus departments. Such meetings could center on any number of topics, such as facility improvements, human resources, vendor agreements, or judicial issues. In addition to regular attendance at meetings, athletics directors also pointed to tasks like email and paperwork as significant time-consumers. They noted that no two days are alike; their schedules vary depending on the day of the week and the season of the year. Several participants stated that the variance in their daily work routine is part of the attraction to the position. *“It’s always just a hundred different things. That’s part of why I like it a lot,”* Madison said in reference to the wide assortment of tasks in her “to do stack.” Margaret stated the following when speaking of the diverse nature of her job:

It’s a little bit like being a liberal arts student. We talk a lot about breadth and depth here, and that’s kind of the job. You’ve got to do a lot of different things and you’ve got to be really good at a couple of them. You’ve got to dive deep into the things that you know.

In addition to the variety of tasks mentioned previously, the participants expanded on topics related to budget management, fundraising, personnel management, and campus collaboration.

Budget management

Although they did not go into great depth on the topic, the participants stated that budget management is a very important part of their position. Many were quick to mention that budgeting has been more challenging the last few years. Annamaria, who spent many

years in Division I athletics, spoke of working with budgets at both levels and the challenges that exist everywhere:

Certainly budget is challenging—probably everywhere. I think it's not very different than other divisions, because the expenditures escalate as you go. It's probably all relative—there are only a handful of schools in the country that can balance a budget, period. So everybody is dealing with that. So that certainly is a challenge that been escalated in the last two years. And it's not different from anybody else's.

Sue spent time as the budget manager at a Division II institution prior to becoming an athletics director, and has therefore been a strong asset to her athletics department. She stated that her financial prowess has played a major role in her career advancement, and she encouraged others to become more adept. When speaking of how this knowledge has assisted in her professional ascension, she stated:

I am a big believer that if you are in this field today, and particularly as a woman, if you can grasp and come across as being confident in financial management, it will be a huge, huge benefit to you in your career advancement. People that cannot handle money will not get into areas of leadership.

While the participants spoke of the importance of being financially savvy, many also stated that money can only go so far. As will be noted later, fundraising certainly helps athletics departments to obtain more funding, but there is only so much athletics directors can do to manage the money that currently exists in the budget. Tracking program expenditures, checking coaches' receipts, and projecting future expenses, are some of the typical day-to-day budget tasks participants mentioned. Linda referred to this notion: *"The emphasis is on budget and I'm pretty good with numbers, but there is a limit of how much you can stir the pot and get the money to go."*

Fundraising

The participants stated that while fundraising tends to be a significant portion of athletics directors' duties in Division I and II, the emphasis is increasing at the Division III level. General oversight of their respective athletics departments is what the participants were hired to do, but fundraising continues to become more and more important. As Melanie stated, *"We always deal with scarcity of resources. We rarely deal with an abundance of resources. And so how can we engage people to help us reduce that scarcity? And that's becoming a bigger and bigger issue."*

According to participants, fundraising at Division III institutions typically is done in conjunction with the institution's development or alumni relations staff. Strong working relationships between athletics and these campus offices are vital to fundraising efforts. *"I think in Division III we are doing more PR, meeting with more alums, and doing more alumni events. The alumni office, you've still got to run everything through them,"* Linda stated.

Fundraising has been a good opportunity for participants to develop relationships with alumni and learn about their experiences as student-athletes. Madison stated, *"I enjoy fundraising. I don't know that I want to do it all the time, but I enjoy it because I'm meeting older alums. And it's fun to hear their history of our college."* Annamaria also pointed to the importance of drawing on the positive experiences former student-athletes had while in college:

In Division III, the majority of fundraising is done outside the athletic department, but I've learned that they truly don't tap a resource and that I should be spending more time doing that because nearly a third of our student body and our alums have played. If they had a good experience...their affiliation is going to help them and guide their giving. And it doesn't have to

be athletic giving, but because they had a good experience in their sport they're going to give, period.

Some participants responded that they were not prepared for the increased importance of fundraising, but they have learned much about the process in their current positions. Annamaria referred to building relationships with potential donors, despite her relative inexperience with fundraising:

I do not know fundraising as a profession in the data collection, in all the management from that perspective. But I know that ultimately you're going to get money out of people if they have a good experience, and that you develop a relationship with them. And I can do that.

Sue recalled some of the experiences she has had in working with potential donors, much of which has been learned on the job:

Some of the fundraising that comes on, in which you start talking about multi-million dollar projects and working with your advancement office to set up ways that people can be assisted in term of their financial planning. To sit down and talk to somebody about how they're going to move their stocks and bonds, or how they are going to rearrange those in an effort to be a donor to your project, were things that I definitely had to learn on the fly.

Melanie shared similar feelings about being ill prepared for the amount of fundraising that is part of her job. She has since become very interested in the process and is excited about more opportunities in the future. Fortunately, she has a great relationship with her college's development staff, which has been imperative:

I think moving into the position, the one thing that I wasn't as prepared for that I needed to be, was the increasing demands and change of job description in athletic administration on fundraising, and development of and honing relationships for fundraising purposes.

As discussed later in the chapter, Division III athletics directors work very closely with various constituencies on their respective campuses. As revealed in this section,

development and alumni staff members are crucial pieces in their respective fundraising puzzles.

Managing people

The participants cited personnel management as very important aspects of their duties as athletics directors. Communication and the ability to lead their staffs are imperative attributes that participants mentioned often. While the women had management experience, in various capacities, prior to becoming athletics directors, the amount of leadership and supervisory duties increased considerably when taking on these new positions. Annamaria spoke of the leadership that is necessary in her role:

It's not even motivating people, it's more exemplifying some leadership of what's expected and fulfilling that within yourself to do. Always be willing to do what is being asked of other people. And to try to have a consistent message to what is expected—not specifically related to their sports, but what is expected as a department along with the mission of the institution and try to move that along.

The participants view their athletics staff as their team, and they serve as coaches. As shown earlier, participants highly value their coaching experiences because they can relate to the coaches they supervise. The ability to lead their respective staffs is another instance when their coaching background is relevant. Andrea referred to this:

I view the staff as my team. I'm not coaching a team, but I am coaching the staff. Team dynamics and keeping teams together—those skills and that ability, I'm trying to do the same thing with my staff. The interactions with each other and the morale and how do I communicate, how would a coach communicate with their athletes? Sending expectations for the staff—coaches set expectations for their student athletes as well.

Madison expressed similar sentiment regarding her team. While it takes time and energy to make everyone feel important to the organization, it is important for the department's chemistry. She explained her viewpoint:

Team chemistry is the most important thing to any team and I think it's like that in an athletics department. I've got to make our soccer coach feel as important as the football coach. It's about making them all feel valued and part of something. I think those are things that take a lot of energy.

When being coached by their athletics directors, it is important that coaches and other personnel realize they have their support as well. While they push their respective staffs to improve and succeed, the participants indicated their desire to do so in supportive environments. Linda explained how she constantly seeks ways to make coaches' lives easier:

My philosophy's always been, I'm an administrator to make things better than what it was when I coached. I know what it was like to have to go out and do your own field, or do this or that, and I don't think a coach should have to do that. A coach needs to be recruiting and winning. And they shouldn't have to be worried about game day except for coaching.

Coaches make-up the majority of their respective staffs, but Madison spoke of the importance of managing all personnel well. While some roles may appear larger or more important than others, she never approaches staff in that manner. She truly values each person in the organization and takes pride in her relationships with everyone:

One of the things I learned, I learned it early on, was to be successful you have to appreciate every aspect of an organization. I am as friendly with the custodian as I am with the president. You just have to be—you need those people to help you be successful. And I think that's been kind of a mantra, that everybody is important to me. Nobody is ever more or less important. I learned that and through experiences, that has paid off in the long run.

Evaluation of staff, particularly coaches, is another important type of personal management required of athletics directors in the study. Since their coaches report directly to them, participants stated their desire to appropriately evaluate those staff members. In

addition to showing support for coaches and student-athletes by attending competitions and practices, those are also important evaluation opportunities. Annamaria spoke of these evaluation opportunities:

I think being around the whole process is important. I personally could not be evaluating a coach if I haven't seen them on a consistent basis, and watch from start to the finish. I think some people just go by the results and I think there is always a lot more to it.

Margaret echoed Annamaria's sentiments, speaking about the importance of evaluating coaches in practice and competition settings. She spoke of the way she was evaluated in her coaching career, and explained how she does things differently:

At no point in my history as a coach, did any athletic director come and watch me coach. They'd sort of come to a couple meets, maybe. But how I am as a coach Monday through Friday from four to six and how I am as a coach on Saturdays from 11 to two are a little bit different. They're not vastly different but when you talk about how I am with my kids, how I use my assistants, how I do any number of things, basically you are taking my student-athletes' evaluations of me and reformulating those opinions into your own. You don't have a chance to really figure out your own opinions, if you don't go in and check in on these people. And so that's really how I have tried to do it.

For those who were promoted to athletics director from within their organizations, they mentioned that relationships changed between them and their colleagues. One day they were peers to coaches and others on staff; the next day they were supervising those colleagues. Andrea described her feelings during this transition:

Overnight it automatically changed the type of relationship we had. I went from a colleague and somebody that was working with them collaboratively in a supportive role, to now somebody that was overseeing them. And I think no matter how much you want that relationship to remain the same, based on title and position, it automatically does. That was very hard.

For those who transitioned to different institutions when they became athletics directors, the initial management of their staffs was important. Annamaria's approach was to

adjust to her new surroundings, rather than require that her staff adjust to suit her needs: *“I think it is more adapting to, and learning the environment you’re in, and the people that you’re working with. This job involves me adapting to things and people in situations versus dictating it.”*

The participants discussed the importance of managing their staffs in ways that may allow for enhanced work/life balance. Their views on family-friendly work environments are explained later in chapter four. This information appears in *The Balancing Act*, the third and final section of the chapter.

Campus integration

While they oversee the daily operations and management of their respective athletics departments, the participants spend a considerable amount of time in collaboration with other units on their respective campuses. As mentioned previously, they spend a great deal of time in meetings with personnel from other departments. One participant reports directly to her institution’s president, but all others report to administrators in either academic affairs or student affairs. Therefore, their presence in these campus departments is constant.

In addition to their involvement in the divisions of which they are part, they interact with nearly every department on campus. Their contact with persons outside of athletics is on-going. Madison spoke of her contact with various offices on campus, which she feels may be unique to her position in Division III:

I think for me it’s the ability to make a difference in a lot of different areas; I think that’s probably the biggest thing. I interact with so many different pods on campus, and I don’t think I would do that...at a higher level. I don’t think I would interact as much with different components of campus, whether it’s alumni, development, admissions. I think you get to experience a lot of different things and I think that’s kind of cool.

The development and maintenance of relationships with others on campus is something the participants continually strive to foster. Taking on additional committee work and attending events such as drama, music, and lectures are some of the ways athletics directors try to support other entities on campus. Sue spoke of her active involvement in her campus community:

As an athletic director at a small school, you are expected to be part of a larger administrative community on your campus. When I first arrived here, it was the meetings and committees and people wanting you to be involved in ways in which they could get you involved early. I think you go through this wrestle of how many times you say “yes” and how many times you say “no.”

Annamaria discussed the importance of being involved in her campus community as an opportunity to interact informally, while also discussing work-related issues:

You can get work done because you communicate with people about issues and stuff. So I think that there are multiple reasons. I think it comes back down to another consistent thing that whenever you have a chance to accomplish a couple things with one timeframe, you try to do that.

In addition to serving on committees and attending events, there are various tactics for enhancing visibility. Margaret and members of her staff try to have lunch with admissions staff members each week, “*not to talk business or work, but just to kind of know each other better.*” Andrea eats lunch in the dining hall two or three times a week, which allows her to interact with student-athletes, the general student population, faculty, and staff. “*Those happenstance conversations or meetings are very important,*” she said. “*It could be a 30-second conversation in the cafeteria as you’re getting food, but it’s still an interaction, it’s still a contact, it’s still being visible.*” Melanie explained her informal approach to checking in with her coaches and the greater campus community:

Every once in awhile, probably three times a week, I like to just go take a walk. So I’ll just try to take a walk around campus and just make sure I am

popping into my coaches offices and saying “Hey how’s the season going? What’s happening? What do you need?” I do those types of things and then try to be present across campus in the academic buildings, and just stopping into to see what’s happening.

Athletics directors agreed that visibility and involvement in their campus communities is vital to the success of their athletics programs. Not only do they build relationships with various constituencies, but they also gain insight to things going on at their respective institutions. Sue discussed the importance of being involved in her campus, and the value it brings to the athletics department. She explained what this enhanced perspective provides her:

I would agree that that integrative quality, in terms of it being part of your total campus, first as an administrator, but then having athletics have a seat at the table is really critical. There are so many things that I take away. One is a much broader perspective about the inner-workings of the college and how things that we might need, or we might request; or things that we might be doing, in some way either compliment what the college is doing; or it gives me a better opportunity to understand where we need to position or how we need to be thinking.

Interactions with student-athletes

Another important aspect of the participants’ work as Division III athletics directors is their opportunities to interact with student-athletes. Since all of the participants previously served as coaches, they had grown accustomed to intermingling with college-aged students. Such interactions occur to a lesser extent now that they no longer roam the sidelines or the pool deck, but they strive to know student-athletes as much as possible. As head athletics trainer for 10 years, Andrea knew most student-athletes by name. This changed when she became athletics director, which was challenging for her to initially accept:

There are seniors playing and I don’t know their names yet. I might know them by name, just from reading the headlines and the rosters, but to be able

to put their name with a face—it's definitely not like it was. We have 310 student-athletes.

Melanie found this to be challenging as well, but her relationships have grown in her tenure as athletics director. She discussed the transition from coaching to administration:

That was the hardest thing about leaving coaching, is that you just get to know these students so well. And you just get so excited about their success. When one of my students graduated from pharmacy school, I was just beaming inside; I was so excited for her. And you don't get to formulate as many of those relationships. But then all of a sudden things start developing and you start to know them. I'm starting to know people better now, just because that is a product of being present.

As Melanie mentioned, fostering those relationships as athletics director took some time. Athletics directors stated that since they are removed from daily interactions with student-athletes, it typically takes a few years to develop those strong relationships. Sue explained the greater rapport with student-athletes in her second year:

That's been the biggest difference for me from year one to year two. My comfort level and the way in which I feel more part of the campus, has really been by my opportunity to be much more engaged with our students. For me something was really missing last year and just being spread in so many different directions, you don't always have a chance to. You are there watching kids compete, but it's different to be able to walk down the hallway and say "Hello" to a kid and "How are you doing?"

Although they are not able to interact with student-athletes daily as they once did, the participants highly value the relationships that do exist. They feel they are role models for student-athletes, both men and women, and take great pride in this responsibility. Madison spoke of the thrill of interacting with a diverse group of student-athletes, which she thinks may be rare at other NCAA levels:

One of my friends is an administrator at a Division I school and she does a lot of the same things every day, and she deals with the same population of athletes. You don't do that here. I deal with the judicial kids that get in trouble, I deal with the A team kids we take to dinner that get straight A's.

At the end of the day, participants indicated that working with student-athletes, and supporting them in their athletic and academic pursuits, is why they do this job. Some make greater efforts to know more student-athletes well, but they all have plenty of opportunities to interact with student-athletes. As Linda said, *“I want to continue working with young people, even though I may not be face-to-face with them every day. I think it keeps me young.”*

Long hours

The long hours associated with work in intercollegiate athletes was a significant recurring theme. Although they gave up their coaching and athletic training duties when they became athletics directors, participants are not immune to the time demands of the profession. In discussing the hours associated with their positions, the participants pointed to their irregular schedules and heavy workloads. Most desire to attend most or all home events, which typically occur during evenings and weekends. Furthermore, their heavy workloads force them to spend additional morning and evening hours catching up on work, either in the office or at home.

A day in the life

The participants' daily routines vary. Some wake early in order to work from home or arrive to the office early. Many spend evening hours in the office or at home working, often times responding to emails they cannot address during daytime hours because they tend to be occupied by meetings. Although they often attend competitions on weekends, some also squeeze in office work during those days, too.

Linda is an early riser, typically arriving to the office several hours ahead of her colleagues. Annamaria mentioned if there are evening events, she may arrive late that morning or the following morning, depending on the week. Margaret rarely arrives at the office before nine o'clock, because as she stated, *"Nothing in the athletic world happens before noon anyway. My being here from nine to noon is more about the rest of the college than it is for my coaches. Everything athletic kind of happens in the afternoon."* While Sundays used to be days off, Madison indicated that this has changed and Sunday events are now regular occurrences. She expressed her frustration with this:

And now what's happened is contests are on weekends now, award ceremonies are on weekends now. I look at my Sundays now, I mean you're down to like—there are just very few days where there's nothing you have going on. And that's kind of sad because I think everybody does need a break. But you can't say, "Well I'm not going to come in on Monday," because the rest of the world works on a Monday.

Competition attendance

The participants try to attend as many home events as possible; many attend every event, at least in part. They travel with teams from time to time, but this occurs infrequently because it would cause them to miss home contests. Many do travel for their teams' postseason appearances, such as conference, regional, or national competition. While game management personnel handle most of the actual duties involved with hosting events, athletics directors' attendance is important for several reasons, such as providing support to student-athletes and coaches, as well as observing coaches for evaluation purposes. Margaret stressed the importance of attending events:

You don't have to go to every practice, you don't have to go to every game, you don't have to go to all of every game, but you've got to go. You've got to peak your head in at practice, you've got to peak your head in, you've got to

know parents, you've got to say hi to people, because not just the coaches, but the kids need to know you care. They need to know you care enough about what they are doing, that you are going to spend X number of hours on your Sunday.

Abundance of work

Their irregular schedules force them to work several hours per week, but their heavy workloads also compel them to put in long office hours. Division III athletics departments tend to be understaffed, therefore great amounts of work land on athletics directors' desks. Madison stated, *"Your job is never done. You have to wear so many hats sometimes, it can be overwhelming."* Annamaria also alluded to feeling like her work is never done:

I can't get everything done that I want to do here, because it never gets done. That's one of the frustrations—you could be here longer than you are. You never go home and clear your desk and think, "I got everything done today."

Madison spoke of the importance of working long hours in order to do the work well. She pointed to colleagues in other areas on campus who work similarly grueling hours. The "main players at the college" are those who put in extra hours, and as a result they are in positions of power. Referring to the hours necessary to find success in athletics, she said:

I do think that you can choose to be to have that balance, but it is hard to be super successful because the most successful people can always make an extra recruiting call or do a little bit better job on that report, but then there are some people that can just say "it is good enough and that's what I do." But I think to reach your highest level of success; I don't think you can do it in that model in athletics.

Sue credits her parents for her strong work ethic and ability to take on her daunting schedule. *"I always say I get it honestly, because my parents probably worked 70-80 hours a week,"* she said. Melanie also referred to her desire to do the job well, which often demands

great amounts of time and energy. While she has become more realistic recently, she expects to produce high quality work:

I would probably be a lot more stressed out if I wasn't putting a good product out to somebody. I'm learning that I don't need to be a perfectionist in everything that I do, but I also don't want anyone looking at my work or something I am producing and saying, "Wow that is just not very good quality."

Scheduling flexibility

Since their work hours tend to be irregular, participants mentioned the importance of reporting to supervisors who understand their schedules. As long as their work gets done and things run smoothly, the participants feel as though they have freedom. Andrea spoke of administrators at her institution and the importance of such scheduling flexibility:

I feel very fortunate here because my supervisors allow me to do what I need to do. I don't have to keep specific hours. Nobody checks in to see if I am in the office and my light is on at 7 a.m., or if I am here at 6 p.m. They know athletics is a variable and fluid thing and I'm here on Saturdays and at events. I'm very fortunate that I am given a lot of leeway.

Just as it is essential for their supervisors to allow for flexibility in their schedules, the participants stated it is important that they permit the same for their coaches and staff members. However, they stressed that their employees cannot just come and go as they please. Annamaria expressed her feelings toward personnel and the importance of their regular daytime hours:

I truly believe that is part of what you're getting into—when you coach or when you are in administration or when you're a trainer—that's part of what you do. It's nights and weekends, absolutely. You can't get those things to work if you don't prepare during the day for it. You just can't show up.

Just part of the job

Since their schedules are frenetic, sometimes it is hard for athletics directors to keep their pace without experiencing fatigue. After several years of long hours in athletics, Madison mentioned instances of such weariness. Even though she considers herself “*a morning person*” who loves coming to work each day, she spoke of some challenging mornings:

There’s not a day that I ever am like, “I don’t want to go to work.” I get tired sometimes. I think over the last couple of years, I’m finally starting to feel a little bit tired—and I don’t mean tired mentally, I mean tired physically. I’ll be like “Oh my God.”

The participants stated that even though their schedules are hectic, they would not have it any other way. College athletics and student-athletes are their passion; therefore the long hours are worth the sacrifice. As Annamaria stated, she chose to work in athletics and remain in the field after many years:

I don’t feel like it’s kept me from doing things that I really want to do. I will say this—if I weren’t in sports I probably would have a different lifestyle, just because of the timing of things. But I choose it. I have myself to blame if I’m uncomfortable with it.

The participants spoke at length about the time demands of their positions and how they attempt to balance it with their personal lives. This information is explained later in Chapter 4.

Being a *female* athletics director

The participants in this study take great pride in their work as Division III athletics directors, but do not think much about being women in these roles. They do their jobs, lead their staffs, and strive to continuously improve their athletics programs. “*Whether you are*

male or female, you have the same responsibilities,” Linda stated. Melanie set her sights on being a college athletics director while she was in college and expected to be in this position at some point in her career. She spoke of her outlook on being a woman in this position:

I don't look at myself as “Oh there's the female athletic director.” I look at myself as “Oh there's the athletic director.” And that is how I really strive and how I really work to have other people look at me. And that's what I try to do. I'm not downplaying the role for female role models or the significance of my being in this position, because I do understand it's significant. But this has always been my expectation. So therefore, yeah it's a big deal; but at the same time, it's not a big deal.

Andrea echoed Melanie's sentiments, stating she desires to be valued for the work she does, rather than for her gender:

I want to be viewed as a competent professional, not a woman. I want to be viewed as a person who can do the job, and that's hired to do the job. I don't want to be hired just because I am a woman. I don't want to be viewed differently, just because of my gender. And if I have a sense that I'm being hired, not because I'm the most competent, or the most qualified, or the best fit, but because I need to fill their gender quotas—I don't want to be put in that situation.

The participants just want to be put in position to do their work well, which includes supporting their coaches, student-athletes, and other departmental staff. Their ability to lead their departments has nothing to do with their gender. Margaret spoke of her staff members and their feelings towards her being a woman:

I really feel like the people, the coaches on this staff could care less whether I'm man, woman, purple, yellow, Jewish, Christian. They don't care at all, as long as I support their programs, will fight for them, and make their lives better. And so that's what it is at the end of the day.

Annamaria mentioned that women in athletics are no different than women who lead in other professions. They may bring a different viewpoint to the organization:

I like not to make it different. I think females period, in any work setting, bring a different perspective. That's what I believe. We could talk a long

time about what that means, but that's not the point. I'm not an athletic director because I want to be a female athletic director.

Linda spoke of her desire and ability to lead her athletics department as she deems appropriate. After serving eleven years at her institution, she feels that she can do what is necessary for the benefit of her department. She talked about her approach to working with her institution's administration, which appears to be highly valued:

I think I have been very fortunate to have an administration that has supported me. I don't think it's just because I am a female. But I have been quite vocal, if I disagree with them. I've always thought I'm going to speak my piece. I'm not going to worry about if I get fired, I get fired. At no time have I felt threatened because I am a female, so I have to agree with them or whatever. I'm not a token or just someone who is being told what to do, and I am just supposed to follow it.

Some participants did speak about the subtle existence of the “good old boys” club, in both athletics and higher education in general. However, athletics directors indicated that it has not hindered their careers and the prevalence appears to be lessening. Madison referred to the diminishing dominance of men:

I do think that the old boys network is going away. I think there's becoming even, there's now a group of women who are very powerful in administration, and if you know them you are kind of in. I think it's just evolved.

When she was hired as athletics director six years ago, Annamaria recalled that her athletics department was pretty male dominated. She has since hired four women—three coaches and one administrator. “*It's still, in some ways, a male dominated business,*” she said. Linda agreed with this thought, but claimed that her experience working with men has enabled her to work around these minor challenges. She stated, “*I think you still have to buck the ‘good old boy’ situation every day. I think it is easier for me because I’ve worked with men so much.*”

For the most part, the participants feel supported at their institutions. While there are occasional challenges, they typically do not occur because of the participants' gender. Linda said, "*I don't think I have to prove myself because I am female.*" Margaret has had a different experience, very much feeling as though she has to prove herself to her institution's administration. She explained the challenge of this arduous task:

I don't want to say it is hard—it's not easy being the woman in the man's world. And there is, at least for me, kind of this constant need to prove myself. Need to, I don't know if validate is the right word or not, but need to show the world, show the college that I can do the job. And that is time consuming.

The participants stated that if women are prepared for the responsibilities and duties of the athletics director position, there will be opportunities to find success. They feel this is particularly in Division III athletics. Sue referred to this:

I think anybody has opportunity if they are well-prepared and if they are well-versed. And I don't think the stumbling blocks exist anymore, about whether you're man or women or what the color of your skin is. I think it now comes down to having credentials and having the skill set to do that—at least in the Division III level.

The participants agreed that as more women have gained athletics director positions, people are more and more confident with that scenario. For those who have been in the profession for several years, they have seen the climate improve for women who seek and gain athletics director positions. Sue has seen things improve for her female colleagues:

As I have been in the profession, I think it has been one of those things where there seems to be a general, there seems to be a lot more comfort with a woman being an administrator. I think that there were always some chances available, but it might have been as an associate or as an assistant or in the compliance area. And so now I think when you look at women actually being able to direct and lead an entire department, I think there is a lot greater comfort level with that.

In her long tenure as athletics director, Madison has also seen increased confidence in women being in these positions:

I think when people see female athletic directors it's just part of the times; the times have changed. And I think the fact that that whole thing, the whole I guess phenomenon, has changed now. It's not a big deal like it used to be, which I think is really good. It's not near as big of deal right now as it was 20 years ago. Now it's kind of like "oh. They have a female athletic director." Where 20 years ago they had a female athletic director it was kind of more questioned, and now I think it is more of just the fact.

Managing men's sports

The participants have had good working relationships with their male colleagues, including those who coach football or other high-profile men's sports such as hockey or basketball. In reference to men's coaches she has overseen in her athletics director tenure, Linda said, *"I think they have acted very well. I don't think they see it as a male/female situation. That could be different at a larger institution, but I don't see that here or really any place I've been."*

When Andrea was named athletics director, she was able to build on the relationships she had already built with men's coaches during her long tenure as head athletic trainer. Because of this existing relationship, she has not experienced difficulty in working with them. Reflecting back to that transition, she said:

Because those relationships had been established—that professional, working relationship had been established, they knew where I stood on issues. Right away, I was really cognizant of, they knew I would have their back on issues. There are some things you have to make hard decisions on sometimes. But because I had those established relationships and they knew how I worked, I believe they knew that I was making decisions in the best interest of all involved—even if they didn't like them. So I think having those relationships right away, it made it easier for me in the transition.

Since Linda moved to a new institution to be athletics director, she did not have previous relationships to work from. She desired to build a solid foundation with the football coach before she even started the job. It was important for her to make contact with him immediately, in order to begin developing a good working relationship. She recalled her experience:

When I came here they'd never had a female for administration, so I think it was a bigger deal with the football coach than anything. I think I called him after I interviewed here, and I said "I know you've never worked with a female administrator. You have to have questions, let's discuss them." And so he asked a lot of questions. And I think somehow I sold him.

For Madison, it has been important that all coaches understand that every team in her department is treated equally and a hierarchy does not exist. For example, she mentioned that all teams have the same travel accommodations, receive the same amount of per diem, and have the same rules about apparel and uniforms. Student-athletes are made aware of this equal treatment as well. Communicating this equal treatment, and remaining consistent in carrying it out, helps in avoiding conflicts with coaches from higher-profile sports:

They have to understand that when they take the job, and I tell them straight up, "You are going to be like every other sport here. You are going to get the same amount of publicity; you are going to get the same of everything. Now you can be very successful in that because I think all of our sports are, but it's not like you are going to get special things." And I think that's just a philosophical thing, so there aren't really issues.

The participants have had few instances when their ability to oversee men's sports has come into question. As shown previously, they have had good working relationships with their male colleagues. Remarks about them overseeing high-profile men's sports have tended to come from alumni of older generations. Margaret spoke of an alumni function in which she was introduced as the new athletics director:

The look on their faces was like, “Oh they let women do that now?” I mean it was hilarious! And I was like “Yes, you heard that correctly.” Even a couple of them said, “So do you oversee football?” And I’m like, “Oh yes.” And their reaction was, “OHH!”

Sue has had similar experiences with older alumni questioning her ability to oversee men’s sports, at both of the institutions she has served as athletics director:

I always get at least a handful of calls. People say “I can’t understand why they hired a woman. How in the world can a woman oversee a football program?” And I’ve gotten that at every institution. “How in the world can a woman do this?”

She has grown to expect a few of these types of phone calls, and firmly believes it is imperative to have a response ready. Sue continued to say, *“That’s always going to be the one thing that’s out there, that you better have a response to. Because if you don’t have a response, you are going to be making up for it for the next few years.”*

Lack of discrimination?

Other than a few comments here and there, the participants noted that they have dealt with very little, if any, discrimination in their careers. *“I’ve been really lucky. I don’t think I have experienced any level of discrimination,”* Annamaria stated. Linda responded similarly, *“I’ve never felt like I was discriminated against because I was female, even in athletics and so forth.”*

Even early in her career, when she was inexperienced and one of very few women in her department, Annamaria always felt that she had people there to help her though. She recalled this early time in career in college athletics:

So there was never a time when I didn’t have someone who was helping me and that was really oblivious to what gender I was, or what kind of experience I had really. They were just was trying to help. So after that early on period, I always had people. I was really respected for what I was doing. It never felt like, if I were a man it would be different.

While their experiences with discrimination have been relatively non-existent, the participants realize this is not the case with women everywhere. Several women stated they have been “lucky” or “fortunate” not to have faced such treatment. Linda spoke of stories she has heard from female colleagues. She recalled those conversations:

In just talking to different people at conventions and so forth, I don't feel like I have been discriminated against like some of them have. Or I've had more opportunities in the athletic arena than some of them have and they wish they'd had more.

Younger participants noted they were probably just a few years behind some of the unfair treatment. They mentioned being aware of circumstances that existed in the past. “I think I'm just on the cusp of not having to fight,” Madison stated. “I listen to people that are only four or five years older than I am, and they have a very different take on things that they had to go through.” Melanie credited the women who came before her, as they paved the way for her career. She pointed to previous generations of female athletics administrators:

I've been very, very fortunate in my career that I haven't met with immovable obstacles to get to positions. And I know that I am probably very different than others. I realize that is a product of people who have gone before me and fought those battles. So I completely acknowledge that and understand that. I've just been fortunate to not have immovable obstacles. Doesn't mean that there aren't obstacles, but we've been able to either move them, just bulldog through them, or go around them.

Madison talked about the importance of relating well to all types of people. She points to her outgoing personality as something that has allowed her to avoid unfair circumstances because of her gender. She talked about her ability to mix and mingle:

I think some female administrators aren't good in social settings. And if you can't be in those settings, I think it just is difficult. I can sit down with a group of guys, just as easily as I can with a group of women. Where I think some people, and that's just part of my personality—I can talk to just about anybody. I don't struggle, I think that helps. I think it's a communication thing; that is really important.

Sue stated that while she faced some discriminatory things during her coaching tenure, it has not played a significant role during her time as an athletics director. Although she did not state that this happened specifically to her, Sue did speak of the way men and women athletics administrators are sometimes viewed differently:

You might look at a male who is very intense, entrepreneurial, driven, and focused—and that same person in a woman, she just might be declared as being a bitch, and not being flexible, and having an attitude, and being moody. Sometimes those are the things that resonate for me, just a little bit differently than what they would for men.

They recalled a few comments or questions regarding their ability to effectively lead their organizations, but nothing that has caused them to question their place in the profession. “Oh sure you get that stereotypical stuff, but I’ve not felt really any impediments to my success as a female athletic director,” Madison remarked. The participants are confident in their skills and attributes and therefore do not allow such situations to bother them. As Margaret stated, it is important to nip those comments in the bud:

I haven’t really had any bad experiences, save like a very small handful that I cut off pretty quickly. Most of them have been very, very minimal and fine, every once in awhile like I say and it is mostly men, try to kind of tell me what they think I ought to be doing. And I try to quickly and politely tell them that’s not how it is going to go.

Overall, the participants recalled very few instances when they have been treated unfairly as female athletics administrators and directors. In addition, the instances they recalled were very minor, typically including a questioning remark or phone call, typically from older men. While they know of colleagues who faced significant discriminatory challenges, the women who participated in this study have not encountered such barriers.

Passion for Division III

The unique characteristics of NCAA Division III athletes were frequently mentioned by the participants, especially those who have spent many years within this competitive division. As mentioned previously in chapter four, the participants have varying years of experience within Division III, with the least amount of time being six years. Therefore, they understand the positive aspects of the Division III philosophy. The participants spoke extensively, and passionately, about the well-rounded student-athletes and the environment(s) being the right “fit” for them. By and large, athletics directors in this study love the Division III philosophy and the environments that exist on their respective campuses.

Well-rounded student-athletes

As discussed previously in the chapter, the participants claim to have ample interactions with student-athletes at their institutions. While these opportunities occur less frequently than during their coaching days, Division III athletics directors have many opportunities to know and interact with their institutions’ student-athletes. While on the playing surface, they know them as athletes, but they also know them as students and community members.

The participants often spoke of the great focus on academic achievement, which they balance alongside their athletics commitments. As Madison said, *“I really, truly believe the values that our kids are students. I just think it means so much more to these kids. It’s not about what they are getting; it’s about the teammates, and the teams.”* Athletics directors stressed that while student-athletes work hard to compete at high levels athletically,

academics are the priority. Andrea referred to student-athletes within this environment:

In working with this caliber student, they are here because they want an education and they love their sport and they are passionate about their sport. It's not that they're going to school because they are getting paid to play their sport and they might get an education. They are here for their education first and they love it. They enjoy it. They are passionate about it. Working with these student athletes, they are incredible people.

The participants referred to the importance of student-athletes obtaining their degrees, preparing them for life after college. *"In Division III, when we recruit a student-athlete we recruit them to be successful—not just on the playing field, but in life. And if they if they don't graduate, we have failed,"* Linda affirmed. She continued, stressing the value of student-athletes being students first:

How many student athletes from Division III will ever have a chance to go professional? It's kind of like the NCAA advertisement. Yes, you have more of a chance if you are at Division I; as a female you have less chance than the men. It's important that you get that academic degree, so that you can be successful when you leave here. That's probably, at our level, more important than your athletic performance. You want to perform well, yes. But what are going to do when you leave here? What have you learned that will get you to that next step? If you just increase your athletic ability and do not do anything in the classroom, where is that going to leave you?

The participants often referred to student-athletes' opportunities to be more than athletes, meaning they can focus on academics and athletics, as well as other community involvement. They stated that this balance is good preparation for life after college. *"We get the opportunity to get athletes who are going to be very well-rounded. We know that what we are doing with our athletes is going to assist them the rest of their lives,"* Melanie responded. Annamaria also spoke of this balance: *"At this level you can experience it in your sport and you can still be passionate about other things, and still experience other aspects of your life."*

Annamaria spent most of her career in Division I athletics; therefore, she has good perspective on the wide range of college athletics opportunities that exist. She sees great value in both Division I and III athletics, and stressed the importance of student-athletes finding the environment that suits their needs. The philosophies differ between divisions; therefore student-athletes should determine where they fit best:

People don't understand what the difference is and what their experiences will actually be. I've seen it at both extremes actually, and it's all about a fit for students. There are way more students who fit in this environment than that can excel at the levels that Division I require—who put in, what turns out to be the majority of their time, in one thing.

When speaking of student-athletes being well-rounded individuals, the participants noted that campus involvement plays an integral role in the maturation process. Since Division III athletics have shorter competition seasons and fewer time demands, student-athletes have more time to devote to other interests. Annamaria spoke of the leadership opportunities student-athletes have on her campus, particularly in the form of service. She explained the types of activities in which student-athletes often engage:

I think their leadership is demonstrated in different settings more often, whether it be in their academic life or in the political system at the school or in service, which is bigger here than a lot of schools because it's the mission of the institution. But getting involved in community relations and community outreach, I think that happens a little bit more. I think in Division I those types of activities are done purely just to promote their sport and here it is done totally altruistically for a different reason. I think that they develop leadership skills and learn a lot about themselves within their sports, but they take it outside their sport in a bigger way, because they have more time for it.

The participants spoke of the relationships within Division III, where athletics is part of the college experience. The small college environment, where Division III athletics often exist, play a role in these often close-knit communities. Madison discussed the bonds that exist among student-athletes, coaches, and administrators:

It's all about the people. It's all about the relationships and the difference --- they're driven because they are competitive, because they want to win and lose, but also it's the relationships. I think the relationship that Division III coaches have with their players or Division III administrators have with the student athletes, is way different at this level. And it's way special, because you're just around each other a lot, and especially at a small school. You see them in the cafeteria, you see them in the library, you see them at another team's events. They go out and support each other. It's a different environment.

The participants stated that Division III student-athletes are very serious about their athletics pursuits, but their lives are not consumed by the demands of their sport. In reference to this, Madison said, *"It's time consuming in Division III, but they have a life, and that's really the difference."* Margaret also discussed this idea, stating that while valuable lessons are learned through winning and losing, it is not valued above the student-athlete experience:

In Division III, I think we are so much more about the overall experience and individual improvement—and whether or not they've enjoyed their experience and it's been a positive influence in their lives. I think you can do that and not be the conference champion, or not be the national champion, or not have 25 All-Americans on your team.

Athletics directors desire for their teams to be successful, but they clearly value the Division III philosophy of student-athletes developing in diverse ways. The participants enjoy seeing their student-athletes grow and mature during their college careers. Linda illustrated these feelings: *"It's kind of neat to just watch them grow academically, professionally, and personally."*

The right fit

As explained in Chapter 1, each of the NCAA's three divisions has distinct characteristics. The participants pointed to the unique characteristics of Division III athletics

as vital aspects of their professional experiences. They spoke often of the environment and approach to athletics within Division III, which for most is where they spent the majority of their careers. Time and time again, participants stated that they “fit” well within this competitive division. Margaret explained why Division III suits her:

It just feels very comfortable to me. It feels like the right place for me. It feels like, given how I grew up as not only an athlete, but given the importance that education played in my youth. It seems like the right idea to me, to have a pretty equal balance.

Andrea mentioned her passion for this environment, which she experienced as a student-athlete, coach, athletic trainer, and now as athletics director. The philosophy of Division III athletics align well with her own philosophies towards athletics and higher education:

That’s where I was comfortable, that’s what I enjoyed, that’s what fit with my philosophy—not only my educational philosophy, but my working philosophy. I think I would have struggled over there (nearby Division I institution). I could have done it, but where I was at personally and professionally—I just didn’t want to be somebody that just did the job, just put in the time. I think all those experiences and my philosophy, liberal arts education—this is where I fit in.

Like Andrea, Sue stated that her philosophy toward education and athletics fit best with that of Division III athletics. She discussed the importance of working in an environment that aligns with her ideals:

I think this is where philosophically and ethically, I feel like I best align. And that is really the promotion of higher education, with intercollegiate athletics serving as a very strong compliment to that. So I do feel like those fits have been more apparent at Division III.

The participants mentioned their opportunities to interact with student-athletes in Division III, which they speculated was less common in Divisions I and II. By knowing student-athletes, both on and off the playing surface, athletics directors and see such growth

firsthand. Annamaria pointed to these greater interactions in Division III, which, after many years in Division I athletics, is a good fit for her. Her response to a question was:

I think your question was about satisfaction and the obvious one is watching students develop and grow and become different people. I think athletics directors, the higher level that you go, the more insulated you are from the students. And the more people there are in between. Just by sheer nature of the business, you don't have as much contact and that's a benefit and positive reason to be a part of sports and athletics, then it may be a reason not to be an athletics director at the higher level.

Andrea also spoke of these interactions with student-athletes, which she highly values. Despite the all-consuming nature of intercollegiate athletics administration, such interactions with student-athletes are worth the challenging and frenetic schedule. She reflected about her feelings towards student-athletes:

The whole environment of liberal arts, of the small school, of playing because you love to play, and being able to know the student-athletes in a more personal way. To be able to talk with them and get to know who they are and what makes them function, what makes them tick. That's a great experience and that's probably what has kept me here, even through some of the long hours.

In addition to interacting directly with student-athletes, participants also discussed their interactions with coaches. Since Division III athletics department staffs are small, athletics directors have direct supervision over their coaches, too. They have unique opportunities to impact the lives of both populations. Margaret said these daily interactions, with both student-athletes and coaches, contribute to Division III being the best fit for her:

I think the big reward for us is to know that you had an impact in a kid's life -- to be able to watch them sort of grow up under your eyes, to be able to know that you helped to shape that kid's future and life. And you don't get to do it for all of them, because some of them just resist you like nobody's business. But I think the ones that you can point to, where you had a positive impact, I think that's the thing we hang our hats on. I think that's the thing that makes us come to work every day. That's really the thing for me. That, and now that I'm in administration, to have that kind of an impact on coaches as well—to

push them to places that they didn't know they had inside, and get them to do things that they didn't want to or think they could do.

Annamaria also spoke of this opportunity to interact with “*the people*,” meaning she has significant contact with student-athletes, coaches, and various constituencies on campus. As revealed, these are all important aspects of a Division III athletics director’s daily life. Therefore, Annamaria’s needs are met and she fits well within her athletics department and campus community. This desire to work with others is explained in the following statement:

I want to be with the people, I want to help the people. I want to be in the environment where I agree with the mission and my values are in sync with what I am doing. There are all these bigger things that make this invigorating, or that I'm involved in what I should be doing.

Although they desire for their teams to do well and be competitive, participants talked about the overall experience of Division III athletics. While winning is fun, it does not define the student-athlete experience. Athletics directors must balance the desire to sponsor successful teams, while also valuing the big picture. Margaret is a firm believer in the total experience, which again contributes to this environment fitting her well. Her viewpoint is as follows:

It suits my personality. I'm not a 'win at all costs' kind of girl. I'm not an athletics, purely for entertainment purposes, person. I'm not one who lives and dies by whether we win or lose. I'm somebody who values the experience and values the—we used to refer to them as intangibles—the things that kids get through their athletic experience. Things like dedication, and teamwork, and seeing something through to its end, and a competitive spirit, learning how to win and lose graciously. I think all of those things are critical and I value them quite a bit. And so for me it's just a matter of the fact that it's a better fit.

Most participants have spent the majority of their professional careers in Division III athletes, therefore are clearly vested in the environment. After spending time in all three

NCAA divisions, Sue came back to Division III because it aligns best with her ideals about intercollegiate athletics. While she highly values her experiences elsewhere, she is happy to have found a home in Division III. She shared her feelings:

I just think it's a good fit. I think it is a better fit for me because I have had a chance to a channel through those other divisions and have that experience; and I wouldn't trade them. I think there's great value at all the levels; but this just seems to be the best fit for me, where I can get up and go to work every day and feel really proud of what we are doing.

The participants stressed that finding the right fit is imperative, both in an athletics environment and within an institution. In order to work long hours and expend the energy necessary for their respective positions, it is crucial that athletics directors truly value the mission of their competitive division and institution. They enjoy going to work each day and have passion for their careers in intercollegiate athletics. If they did not have the right fit, it would be very challenging to do their jobs well.

The Balancing Act

Work/life balance is a theme that recurred often, as participants noted that the demands of the profession make it challenging to have relationships and take part in outside interests. Throughout their careers, the participants' personal and professional lives have interwoven, with both roles impacting each other. In the midst of the frenetic pace of intercollegiate athletics, they strive to balance those closest to them, find ways for things to co-exist, while also promoting such balance for the coaches and staff members in their respective athletics departments. The data clearly show that these are not easy tasks.

Intertwining of work and life

Throughout their careers in college athletics, participants have spent time as athletic trainers, assistant coaches, head coaches, assistant and associate athletics directors, and now athletics directors. A common theme throughout their career paths is that their personal lives played significant roles as well. Their personal and professional lives intertwined throughout their career progressions.

Relocations often occur when working in intercollegiate athletics, as opportunities for advancement arise elsewhere. Sue and Linda both took positions at other institutions in order to be closer to family during difficult times. Sue gave up her job as Division I head basketball coach to move nearer to her ailing father. Fortunately she landed another head coaching position at her alma mater, which competes in Division III. A year after her father lost his battle with cancer, she felt the time was right to pursue other opportunities. She has moved often in her career, which has impacted her family. Her work and personal lives have very much intertwined throughout her years in athletics. She spoke of the challenges this has presented:

I think every time I've moved it has probably taken even a different toll, in terms of being further away from my Mom and my brother. So that has been interesting. We also adopted a 13 year old, so even when we moved—he's now 22—but when we moved, it was a little bit of schools and how is he going to handle this move and new friends? I wouldn't see that different as any other family making those decisions. I do think that it has to be total team, in terms of making those decisions.

Linda faced a similar situation in desiring to move closer to her father, who was in poor health. There were many aspects of the position and institution that drew her to her current situation, but her family circumstances played an important role as well. She

described the conditions: *“This was open and my father was getting frailer and so forth, so this was a little closer to him. So anyway I took this position and I’m still here.”*

Andrea was already living fairly close to home when her father became ill, so the situation did not require her to move. His illness did, however, provide her important perspective on how she wanted to approach her personal and professional lives. While the circumstances were challenging, she really grew from the experience. Shortly after her father’s passing, Andrea decided to take more time away from work and eventually transitioned to an administrative position. She explained that family life began to have more impact on her career:

I think that really hit home for me when I was an athletic trainer, my dad died of cancer. And he died working. It was at that point in time, I had missed a lot of family stuff because I couldn’t—I had a Saturday game or I was on the road, so I was really struggling with that. That was a real turning point for me professionally. Those family times became more and more crucial, and more and more important. And that really hit home to me at that point in time, that it really made me reflect on what was I doing.

Annamaria stated that she did not make career moves based on personal relationships, but rather on her personal satisfaction and professional desires:

I’ve not made choices—career choices, based on my personal associations. My personal satisfaction, or my personal contentment or personal challenges or life, but not necessarily because of associations that I’ve had. I’ve never made decisions based on that.

Although she did not make career choices based on her personal relationships, Annamaria’s most recent move to becoming an athletics director did provide an opportunity to be closer to family. She had been in another region of the country for 11 years; therefore the chance to move closer to home was enticing. It was her professional life that largely drove her relocation, but the proximity to family was important. Since her aging parents,

siblings, and nieces and nephew are nearby; the job was even more appealing. “*Sometimes there are bonuses that you don’t even predict,*” she said. Like Annamaria, Margaret did not accept her current position because of the closer distance to family, but she does enjoy it after spending most of her adult life in another part of the country. Although she was not intentional in moving closer to her mother and two brothers, she likes seeing them more often and as a result she said, “*those relationships are actually better.*”

Linda does not regret the decisions she made throughout her life, but did mention that she could have been a little more intent on obtaining and maintaining work/life balance. She did not determine whether this was a product of her career in college athletics, or just her career in general. She explained her experiences:

I always put my personal life on the backburner, because when I was young I thought I had all these years. You always have time to get married and have a family. And then you get in the grind just trying to drive, drive—and I guess I wish I would have done a little bit more personal and family wise than what I have.

Linda explained that after she put her personal life on hold for most of her career, she found the right person who understood the demands of her job. Unfortunately, he passed away before they were able to retire and as a result, she now views personal life differently. She talked about her personal circumstances and how she has been impacted professionally:

And after I moved here, I met that person that understood, but he was a workaholic. I was a workaholic by then, so we decided “Okay. We’re going to do these things, we are going to retire this year, and then we are going to do all these things.” So that’s how we lived our life and we kind of cross paths. He’d be leaving when I was coming home and vice versa and then he ended up dying. And so that’s what kind of opened my eyes. And all of a sudden, since then the last four years, I’ve been doing things a lot different.

Melanie has been intentional about making career decisions based on the best interest of her family. When she looked for fulltime coaching positions coming out of graduate

school, she turned down a head coaching position because it was too far from both she and her husband's families. *"So we decided to turn that down, which was really scary. It's really scary to come out of graduate school, have a job, and go 'No, I'm not going to take it,'"* she said. Fortunately, she was later offered another head coaching job. While she was excited to take over a program that had been very successful, she explained that *"more importantly, it was appealing to be close to my family and to my husband's family."*

Melanie's desire to look out for her family's best interests continued very recently, when she was offered an administrative position at a Division I institution. In making a "family oriented decision" in which she considered her husband's career in athletics and the well-being of their daughters, she declined the opportunity. She explained the decision to remain and continue building the programs at her current institution:

The complete and utterly honest answer for why I did not go to a Division I institution when I had the opportunity to do so is because my family is very happy where we are at. My husband is very, very happy in his job and he is not in a situation where he can just pick up and find another job quickly.

Andrea has not relocated based on her personal life, although as shown previously, her perspective changed with the passing of her father. Shortly thereafter she transitioned to an administrative position, which has allowed for more flexibility and time for family. If it were not for this opportunity to gain a more flexible position, she likely would have exited college athletics all together. Her personal and professional lives intertwine daily, but she prioritizes to make it work for her family. She explained her feelings prior to finding a position that met her desires:

I think for a long time, I assumed that because I was in the job I was, I would have had to make a complete career change in order to have a family. I don't I think that was an assumption on my part based on what I felt I needed to do to be successful, not necessarily what was actually true. Once I found that out

and realized that and really put family first, the job, the career came in line with that. There are always going to be, you're always going to have to make some sacrifices here and there, whether it is job or family. Always try to put your family first, in doing that. And if the job gets to a point where it's interfering too much with family, then I think you need to reevaluate the job.

As shown, the participants' personal and professional lives have intertwined throughout their careers. The remainder of this chapter explains how they continue to balance these dual roles, despite the unique challenges. As Sue explained, she experiences these dual roles daily in the decisions she makes:

Even if you're home on a Saturday spending time with your family, if you have an event on campus, I feel a huge obligation or I feel very torn or guilty, in terms of either having to be there and not time with my family. Or if I make that decision to be with my family, then I'm not being at the job.

Balancing people

When striving to find balance between their professional and personal spheres, participants need to balance the people in their daily lives. This can be a challenge, as it is important that these constituencies understand the unique demands of athletics director positions. The participants have personal relationships and share their lives with husbands, partners, and boyfriends. In addition to their partner or spouse, three women have children of varying ages. Some participants have friends who are very much part of their personal lives, so it is important to meet their needs, too. Regardless of the people whose lives they touch on a daily basis, participants work to ensure that strong relationships remain in tact.

Significant other

Participating athletics directors have various circumstances related to their personal lives. Three women have female partners, one is married to a man, one has a serious

boyfriend who lives in another part of the country, one lost her long-term boyfriend a few years ago, and one is single. Their respective personal statuses impact the ways they approach work/life balance.

Regardless of their current personal status, participants agreed it is imperative that athletics directors have significant others who understand the demands of the profession. As revealed previously in the chapter, athletics directors work long and irregular hours, which partners and spouses must understand and accept. *“I think it takes a really remarkable partner or spouse to really appreciate and understand what we as athletic administrators, not necessarily are required to do, but really should do,”* Margaret said. The participants responded that facing the demands of the profession, while maintaining a supportive personal relationship is very challenging:

To attain success as an athletic director or athletics administrator, and to attain success as a partner or husband or wife, it's really difficult to be perfect in both. Or to find that perfect balance, I just think it is almost impossible actually.

Melanie's husband also works in college athletics, which she values because he realizes the demands of her position and the schedule she maintains. While there are still challenges associated with stresses of her career, he accepts their circumstances and fully supports her. She explained her husband's role:

He gets it; understands. It doesn't mean that he doesn't get frustrated, but he gets it. He understands the need to be present. He understands the need to have to take cell phone calls. He understands the need to sit at my computer at night sometimes and just answer the e-mails and get those taken care of. Him having an intercollegiate athletic background is very, very valuable because if he didn't have those experiences, I don't think that this would work. So that is very important.

A telling sign of the support shown by spouses and partners is their willingness to

move, if a professional opportunity arose elsewhere. The participants have moved or realize that moves may be important in the progression of their careers, so it is important that significant others understand this possibility as well. *“Thankfully, of my three relationships, they’ve all let me kind of be the lead, in terms of they would go, if I wanted to go. I think they would have all gone,”* Madison explained. Since her current and former partners do not work in specialized fields, they have been willing to consider moves elsewhere. She has been at the same institution for over 20 years, but is happy to have the support if a move were imminent. She continued, *“I’m not ready, but I think that’s been good. But they have all been willing to do what I would want to do.”*

Melanie also has a supportive husband in this regard. They met in college and he followed her to graduate school so she could pursue her career in college athletics. When she was offered a position following graduate school, he was happy to follow and pursue his continued education and career in that location. She spoke of his support:

One of the things that I’ve very grateful for, is that I have a husband who, from like the time we met, knew that “Okay here are the things that I’m going to be doing.” And he said “Okay.” So he has his goals and things too, and has made many, many sacrifices so that I could go and do what I want to do. So he literally would have followed me all around the country if we needed to do that.

Sue’s coaching and administrative career has taken her to several institutions in varying parts of the country. She felt these moves were necessary, in order to move up the professional ladder. Fortunately, her partner has been very supportive of these relocations. Sue explained the sacrifices her partner has made:

It’s always been a very collaborative decision with my partner to move, and it’s always been a full team approach. But in all honesty, it’s always been a sacrifice for my partner to find work very high in her profession. It’s difficult when you’re trying to go two for two. It’s always been a very supportive

relationship and to her credit, a lot of support.

While participants stated that their significant others are very supportive of the frenetic pace of their careers, the balance between their work and personal relationships is something they work at. Andrea and her partner, who both had “*workaholic*” tendencies prior to the arrival of their daughter, strive to ensure that both of their careers can flourish, while also meeting the needs of their daughter. Andrea’s role as athletics director is busy, compounded by the fact that her partner “*doesn’t have a nine to five job either.*” While they could get by with these hectic schedules years ago, they now aim to have maintain a more regular schedule for their family.

Madison, who stressed that she is “*horrible at work life balance,*” and her partner experience similar struggles in attending to their relationship. As evidenced in following quote, the pace of their careers clearly challenges their home life. “*In our life, we both work a lot, I mean a ton. We both work long hours and we do a lot,*” she stated. While she has been at the same institution her entire professional life, her personal life has been less consistent. Madison explained the challenges experienced in her personal relationships throughout her career in college athletics:

Personal life is hard. I’ve been here 24 years and in that time, I have been in three, seven-year relationships. And the second one ended because I worked too much. It was probably a good thing, but clearly it’s sort of sad when someone says “I just want to spend some time with you.” And in some ways I chose my job over that person. So I’m in a relationship now, but I think I’m hitting that—it’s like seven to eight years right now, I think I am in the same place where I need to either decide my relationship is going to get more attention or—because it’s the same thing. It’s like you only have this much time. How do you carve it up?

Sue calls her work/life balance “*a work in progress.*” She and her partner have been together for many years, but they are not immune to the challenges of maintaining their

relationship in the midst of Sue's busy schedule. Stating that the "*work is sometimes all-consuming,*" she credits her partner for being able to tune out her work while at home. She spoke of the challenge to be present when at home:

Most of the time my partner is the one driving the balance issue. It's really hard for me. I have a 15-minute drive home, and it's still really hard for me to be decompressed by the time I get home. It's not unordinary for me to go home and have dinner, and go right back to my laptop.

For the participants who came to serious relationships later in life or are single, their circumstances may or may not have been dictated by their careers in intercollegiate athletics. Margaret spent the better part of her career as a head swimming coach, which meant long hours of coaching and recruiting. While her schedule was challenging, she is not sure if her career in athletics was to blame for her relationship coming later in life. Margaret and her boyfriend live in different parts of the country, as both of their careers require them to reside in their current locales: "*We both aren't going to forgo our careers in subjugation to the other.*" She spoke of their arrangement, which she described as "*weird*" and "*not a normal situation,*" and her view of how it may or may not have been impacted by her career:

I guess my career choice has probably defined that a little bit. But I think you could also say that the lateness to which I've come to this big, serious relationship, has defined that as well. Had I come to this big, serious relationship in my mid-twenties, when I was kind of confused and didn't know where I was going, I might have just done that, and chosen some other path. Who's to say? It's kind of a chicken and egg thing with me. I don't really know whether the relationship is driving the job, or the job is driving the relationship. That's hard to say.

Linda acknowledged that she was very focused on her career for much of her life, which probably contributed to her not settling down until later on. However, she also indicated that prior to meeting her long-term boyfriend, she had trouble finding men who understood the demands of her job. She discussed her frustration:

I think what really ticked me off the most is, unless you are in athletics, you have no idea the hours it takes. They think you just show up for a game. You don't have to do anything, you just show up for a game and they play. That just irritated the heck out of me.

After she arrived at her current institution, Linda found the person who understood the demands of her position. She explained that she and her boyfriend were not married, stating, “*You don't get married at my age.*” The relationship worked for them, as she was able to keep up with the demands of her job and he kept up with his career as well. She explained their shared experiences:

The last relationship; we both were workaholics. What time we had, I think we used it very wisely and had quality time together. We planned all these things that we were going to do when we retired. But both of us were mature enough, we knew what life provided. You may not have tomorrow. But we did it anyway.

Annamaria spoke of her personal situation and her thoughts of being a single woman in this profession. She is content and satisfied with her career and the ways her personal life has been enriched by friendships with colleagues. She reflected on the intertwining of her personal and professional lives:

There are choices that I have made—is the fact that I haven't gotten married because I am in this business? Um no, I don't think so. I think it is because I haven't found the right person. And it could be that I have a lot of male friends and a lot of really good friends, female friends too, from this business and I feel that it nourishes you in other ways. There was a time when I thought it was really important for me, when I was in my twenties, to have a family. I was engaged for six months and it was the wrong person. And so did that affect my interest in just working at that a little bit, at that period of time? Probably. And then it just evolved—my life evolved differently than that. So, I don't have regrets about that.

As indicated, the participants responded it is imperative that athletics directors' spouses and partners understand the extreme and unique demands of the job. If they do not accept the irregularities of the position and schedule, the relationship likely will not work.

Additionally, participants stated it is their responsibility to tend to the needs of the relationship, too. Sacrifices must be made in both directions. As Madison stated, she learned this by experiencing it firsthand: *“I learned that lesson, and you learn it the hard way. Ultimately, I think you’ve got to have both. I think to truly happy; you’ve got to have both.”*

Children

Three participants—Andrea, Melanie, and Sue—have children. Andrea and her partner have a young daughter; Melanie and her husband have three young daughters; and Sue and her partner have an adult son they adopted as a teenager. While their lives differ simply because of the varying numbers and ages of their children, participants have had similar experiences as they juggle the demands of their careers with care giving responsibilities.

The participants stated that it can be challenging to manage these two worlds, but with communication and a supportive partner or spouse, it can be done. *“Since our daughter came along, we’ve really had to work on communication. It was a struggle at first, it really was,”* Andrea said. As shown earlier in the chapter, the hours associated with athletics administration are extended and irregular, which Andrea noted makes communication especially important: *“Those schedules get totally thrown off and it takes a lot of communication and a lot of work with your spouse or with your partner, to make that adjustment.”* Melanie pointed to this communication with her husband as well:

It’s who’s busy and we are just constantly talking about it. “Okay you’ve got them today?” “No, I’ve got them today.” “Okay great.” “Hey I’ve got this meeting; what do you have going on?” I am constantly talking about it with him and I’m trying to get those things figured out.

In addition to communication, both Andrea and Melanie stressed the importance of careful planning. Andrea's partner and Melanie's husband both work fulltime jobs as well; therefore daily routines for both couples revolve around two jobs. Andrea described what her thought process could be like on any given day:

There's a level of communication that has to happen at home, such as "Okay, I am going in late today because I will take her to school." She is in preschool now and it starts at 9 so "Okay I'll drop her off." She is three minutes from here, so it makes it easy. I'll drop her off at nine and I'm in at work by ten after nine. "Can you pick her up today?" We try to pick her up at 4:30 so she is not there huge amounts of hours. So I'll pick her up at 4:30, but then my partner might have an appointment at night. I'll pick her up at 4:30 if I've got to be back at a volleyball game that starts at 7:30, so we'll stay home for dinner and eat dinner together.

Melanie's husband also works in college athletics; therefore his work schedule is irregular as well. Although their work schedules are busy, they have a system that suits their family's needs. Their daycare provider, who Melanie described as "outstanding" and "a really big part of the package," is a key component in their ability to balance it all. Melanie described a typical day, which includes both work and shuttling their children here and there:

So it's a balance. My husband will often times have 6:30 a.m. workouts on campus, so he'll be out the door to a 6:30 workout. I'll be getting the kids ready. He gets home to take the oldest one to school, and then I'm getting the other two into daycare around 7:45-8:00, somewhere in there. So typically I am in the office by 8:00-8:15, depending on our schedules. Then I will be here until 4:15 or so. Because I'm usually picking up our kids because then he will have workouts again in the afternoons. So then I am going to pick them up and get them going. And then when he is done with students, then we get an opportunity to pop into games or see what's happening here. So I'm a typical 8:00-4:15 if you want to talk about office hours. But then that little break at home, and then many times just coming back in for a little bit.

While it is challenging to balance their children and their careers, Andrea and Melanie strongly value the life experiences their careers provide for their children. Both spoke of the opportunities for their children to interact with student-athletes, many of whom

serve as role models for their daughters. Melanie explained the value in such relationships:

I know that there is going to be a point where my kids are going to rebel against us, and that's just part of growing and the process. But if they can have 300 and some role models here, that are telling them "Hey that's not the right thing to do" or "This is how you be a good person" or "This is how you do this"—that's pretty important.

In an effort to combine work and family time, Andrea and her family have done some travel with teams. She appreciates the interactions her daughter has with student-athletes, who serve as important role models. She spoke about the great experiences her daughter has had:

We went down to Florida, we traveled with the softball team during spring break. She was on the plane and in the bus and in the vans and she thought she was just the biggest kid. She didn't want anything to do with me. She was always hanging out with the girls. And she thought that was really cool. And I couldn't imagine a better environment for her to be in—these student athletes are phenomenal. Even the guys are great with her, and it's just been interesting to watch her grow up, interacting with the college students.

Andrea and Melanie are both content in the ways they balance their work lives and their roles as mothers, but neither claims to have it all figured out. They each have their moments of guilt, where they feel like one of their roles should receive more attention. *"It's an ongoing battle between feeling guilty about not being at work and then feeling guilty about being at work,"* Andrea claimed. Melanie gave an example of one of these moments of culpability:

If you want to talk about impact, there is a big sense of guilt on my part that I get home and they will be like "Mommy, Mommy, Mommy, da da da." And I'm just like "Whoa, OK, stop. We need to stop for just a second and calm it down a little bit, because I've been going a million miles an hour all day. I need to have something." So there is some of that sense of guilt that happens there.

Since Sue and her partner adopted their son when he was a teenager, her experiences as a mother and an athletics administrator differed. She did, however, mention similar desires to mix fun activities into work-related events: *“I found myself being much more concerned about the fun in his life and his ability to do some things.”* She explained how her family worked around athletics competitions or events:

We adopted him when I was coaching, so he generally would travel quite a bit. And he would go recruiting quite a bit. But we’d always do special things after that, so that was going to the big Bass Pro Shop or dinner. He always had his choice to do things that he wanted to do.

The participants who do not have children stated it was their personal choice not to have children of their own. Although their busy schedules would make it challenging to have children, they reported that this did not significantly impact their personal decisions. They all have nieces and nephews, and though many years of working in college athletics, often consider themselves to be surrogate parents to current and former student-athletes. *“In a way, I’ve had hundreds of children myself, just with student-athletes. And you’re a parent to them. I’m not sure if I ever wanted to be a true parent,”* Linda stated. Madison explained her relationships with student-athletes, as well as her nieces and nephews:

I don’t have a family of my own, necessarily, like children. But I feel like I have a zillion children, in terms of through the years, of people who are special to me and close to me. But it’s hard and thankfully I have some great nieces and nephews. So I can get that fix and in some ways, that really kind of works for me. I love them, I see them. We spend a great time together, but yet I don’t know that I would want to be that one. And I think that’s kind of cool.

Margaret was fairly certain, from a young age that she did not desire to have children of her own. She joked that between her nieces and nephews, her Godson and his siblings, her coaches’ children, and the student-athletes she has coached and administrated over, her *“maternal needs are all being met.”* She explained her desire not to have children of her

own:

I knew from an early age that I did not want children. So I don't know that my choice to be involved in intercollegiate athletics drove that decision. I knew from when I was like a senior in high school or half way through college. I was like "Nah. I'm not interested in doing that." And the weird thing is, I think I am really great with kids.

Friends

While personal life consists of significant others and children for some athletics directors, friends play a key role in the personal lives of some other participants. A number of friendships have developed as a result of professional contacts in intercollegiate athletics, but participants also noted they appreciate having friends outside the business.

As revealed previously in the chapter, professional networking relationships often develop into close friendships. This is the case for Annamaria, who considers many of her professional colleagues among her best friends. One thing she misses in her move to Division III athletics is seeing and interacting with her Division I colleagues regularly. In a measure to cutback on professional development expenditures, she no longer attends the NCAA convention every year. She explained how this professional decision has impacted her personal life:

What I do miss is—the bulk of my colleagues are in Division I and this is the first year in 25 years that I haven't been to the NCAA convention. Because we just were cutting back a little and I've asked the coaches to cut back on their professional development. So I decided I can't just do whatever I want. So I sent my SWA this year and I'll go next year or whatever but, it's more important for her to go than me. So I don't see those people as much anymore. That's one of the harder things probably.

Although she may not see these friends on an annual basis anymore, she continues to remain in touch via email and telephone. Additionally, she is intentional about keeping in

contact with former co-workers at her previous institutions. Since their lives are busy, they do not catch up as often as they may like. However, she mentioned that reconnecting is easy for those she considers good friends. She said, *“You could go for months and you can still catch up really fast.”*

In her previous position as head swimming coach, Margaret spent 18 years at the same institution. During her time there, she developed valuable friendships, both with persons in and out of athletics. While she had a vibrant social life aside from athletics, she stated that more friendships resulted from her athletics connections. She said, *“I think a lot of the socialization happened around the people you work in with.”* For example, she became Godmother to the son of her assistant and his wife, who were two of her very good friends. She explained that they may not have met if not for her career in athletics:

That was born out of my professional life, and might not have happened had we not known each other professionally. So I think you are exactly right, of course I had a personal life. But it was born out of the professional life, not the other way around.

Madison’s good friends are an important part of her life. In addition to her relationship with her partner, she considers this group of women crucial to her personal life. She spoke of her core group of friends and what they bring to her personally:

I have an inner circle of friends and we refer to it sometimes as the IC. We joke about it. There are six of us. And we just do stuff together and they’re your friends, friends. We try and we’re busy, they are all very successful professionals. They’re all doing their own thing, but we try to be grounded and have dinner or drink. We drink a lot of wine.

She has many good friendships that developed as a result of her work in college athletics, but appreciates that her good friends allow her to escape her professional life. Even though most of these friends work outside of athletics, they understand the demands of her

position. They realize her schedule is hectic, but also allow a release from the stressors of her job. She spoke of her “inner circle”:

In this group you’ve got one person in college athletics, you’ve got one high school administrator, you have two business people, and a designer; they’re random. But it’s fun because we all have very different things, but that’s kind of what makes it fun, too. You go out with a bunch of athletic people, you talk athletics. You just do.

As the participants juggle their professional lives with their families, they also strive to balance work with their friends, too. Again, this is an ongoing challenge for athletics directors who have very demanding work schedules. Annamaria explained that her challenge lately has been with friends who do not completely understand the seasonal demands of her job. For example, they may invite her for vacation or traveling, which she cannot do certain times of the year:

I can’t take a week off in the fall—I can’t do that. That’s when friends say, “That’s the best time to go to Europe.” “Well I guess not, I am not going then.” So it’s just kind of one of those things and sometimes that’s frustrating. But it’s not frustrating for me; it’s frustrating for somebody else.

Finally, Madison spoke to the notion that athletics directors must choose their leisure time wisely, which includes time with friends:

I think ADs don’t have—how would you say this? I think you don’t have a lot of acquaintances; you tend to have more friends. You have your family and your friends, because between your job, and your family, and your close friends—it’s really hard. You choose things that socially are meaningful to you, because you don’t have a lot of time to do things that aren’t.

Make it work

Participants often spoke of the challenges associated with balancing their personal and professional lives. Regardless of whether they seek to balance their spouse or partner, children, friends, or hobbies with their careers, doing so is a daunting task. Margaret said, “I

think the biggest challenge is the whole work/life balance thing. How do you be a wife and mother and a professional, with the stereotypes and social norms about how to be a good wife and a good mom?" When looking at how they attempt to make it all work, themes developed related to it being a continuous struggle, as well as tactics for integrating life into work and prioritizing the facets of their lives.

A constant struggle

Throughout data collection, participants often mentioned the time demands of their positions, making it challenging to maintain work/life balance. Although they employ various tactics in an attempt to balance it all, they stated it is a constant challenge that needs regular evaluation and adjustments. Andrea talked about the struggle to balance a demanding job with a partner and young daughter:

It's still evolving. Making it work is a constant process. It is a continuous balancing act. And the way I have been that I have made it work, at least for me, is that I've tried to bring my family in and make it as much a part of here as I can.

While they work to balance both worlds, work and home, participants stated there is no way to maintain perfect balance. No matter how hard they work at it, at some point they feel that one is paid more attention. Melanie spoke about this, stating that her family sometimes takes a backseat to her work:

I have a family who understands and not purposely, but I know that oftentimes they come in second. I don't do that on purpose, and it's not because I love them less, and it's not because I don't care about them. It is because I want to provide well for them, and because I do want to do my job well, and want people to continue to want me to do my job well. I can provide well for my family and things, so they have an understanding of that. They don't feel—I hope they don't feel second fiddle, but they also know that I have to put a lot of time into what I do.

When addressing the regular adjustments made in order to meet her personal and professional needs, Andrea spoke of her daughter's future potential involvement in activities. While her daughter is not too involved in these types of things yet, her family will make adjustments if and when the time comes. She talked about her flexible schedule and changes she may make in the future:

I think it's a constant battle, and you're going to have to adjust. As things change, as she gets older it's a different adjustment. She gets active in sports or whatever activity she chooses, I'm going to want to go and watch her and be engaged in her activities. So boy I'll maybe I come in at 7. Maybe it's, "Can you be with her and so I can leave at 3:30? So I can go watch her game at 4." Then maybe I will do some things at night at home.

Although Margaret came to her long-term relationship later in her career, she is fully aware of the constant challenge women face in balancing their careers in college athletics with their personal lives. After spending over 20 years in the profession, she can speak to this struggle women face. She talked about this challenge:

I think that's got to be the biggest heartburn that a lot of women must face. They've got to have husbands or partners who are enormously supportive and really understand what it means to be an athletic administrator at the collegiate level, because your weekends aren't weekends.

Combine work and life

As their long hours and busy schedules have been documented previously in this chapter, participants seek opportunities to integrate their personal lives into their work lives. They stated that integrating their personal lives into their professional lives is vital in maintaining some sort of work/life balance. Madison spoke of the importance of this incorporation:

You have to somehow integrate your family and your family has to want to integrate with your job, or I think it would be impossible to completely

separate the two. Because of the nature of it, contests are at night and on weekends.

The participants' spouses, partners, and children often attend home events. Since athletics directors feel they need to attend most, if not all, home contests, it is an easy opportunity to integrate family into work. Given that both parents work in the same athletics department, Melanie's family spends a lot of time at athletics competitions. She talked about the convergence of her roles in these settings:

You find the times in which you are playing a dual role; the times that I'm at a game on campus with my kids where I am a dual role of mother and athletic director. You're always wearing three or four hats at the same time and it doesn't mean one is more important than the other, it just means they are different at different times. I think that's how you do it.

Although participants do not often travel with teams, such opportunities allow them to work while enjoying personal time. Annamaria sometimes takes advantage of away games, although she typically travels on her own, to visit her family. She explained how she utilizes these opportunities:

I find ways and it's often a combination of things, to try to do more than one thing at the same time. I think I have done that really well. I will see a game—I will go see our football team when it plays at a certain school because it is an hour from my house and so I'll just visit with people then. I have figured a way to do that.

Andrea travels with teams some, and has taken advantage of institutional rules that allow staff members' children to travel with teams; she takes her daughter on road trips occasionally. Some institutions allow for more integration simply because they allow for this to happen. Andrea spoke of the good fortune of being allowed to take her daughter on trips:

They kind of run together and they integrate themselves. We're fortunate—we're able to allow our kids to travel on buses and in the college vehicles. So I put my car seat in the college van or the college bus. And they're right there and coaches have that opportunity to do that as well.

Participants mentioned the fine line that exists when allowing their personal lives to integrate with their work. While they typically have other staff members at events for game management and supervising duties, athletics directors tend to work at events, too. It is hard for them to attend competitions without doing some work. Melanie explained her philosophy regarding her daughters accompanying her to competitions:

I've really, really worked that my personal life can come into my professional life all that it wants too. But it doesn't get to interfere with my professional life. Does that make sense? So it gets to come in. You are going to see me, we have a softball game today at 4 o'clock. And I have to meet with the tennis team at 4:30, but you will probably see me, and you might see me pushing my stroller around with my other two kids following me around—because it has to mesh. And one of the cool things is that my kids know they get to see mommy, but it's going to be at the basketball game tonight. That's one of the things about me being here that everybody accepts, and everybody knows that's just how it is going to be. But I tell you what, if there is an emergency my kids know exactly what they need to do, so that I can go handle that emergency. And it's not going to be an interference with the job that I need to do.

In addition to her daughters' regular attendance at home events, Melanie also takes her husband on occasional business outings. When serving on an NCAA committee, her husband accompanied her on a trip for committee meetings. Additionally, they traveled with a team to the NCAA tournament, allowing them to support student-athletes and coaches, while also interacting with parents and alumni. These instances allowed the couple to get away and enjoy some time without children and the daily grind of their home and work responsibilities, while also completing important work-related tasks.

While the participants value their own opportunities to mix business with pleasure, they also discussed allowing their coaches and staff members to integrate their personal and professional lives, too. Athletics directors' philosophies toward fostering family-friendly work environments and encouraging work/life balance are explored later in the chapter.

Prioritizing lives

The participants reported that since their professional lives are challenging, it is important to have their priorities in line. Regardless of what their own priorities may be, participants said this is important in reaching some level of work/life balance. For Andrea, her partner and daughter are her priorities; therefore, she strives to meet their needs as much as possible, while also leading her athletics department. Family and work align well for Andrea, as she stated the following about these roles:

I think being an athletic director has made me a better parent. And being a parent has made me a better athletic director. I really believe that. They complement—each part, each aspect of that has complemented the other.

Participants often mentioned they need to take better care of themselves, which could include their physical, emotional, or spiritual well-being. Madison spoke of the need to take better care of herself, as she is more tired than ever. Each year she intends to have more balance in her life, but now she realizes she *needs* that balance. She mentioned her desire to make that more of a priority in the future:

There's just very little work life balance. I mean it's work and a little life. It's just really hard to balance; I'm horrible at it. I laughed, when you do your goals every year, as you write down what your goals are; it's on there every year—work life balance. I need to get better at it. I do. I think I'm at a point right now that I feel like I need to have some, which is different than "Oh I should have it." I think right now I do need a break. I'm just tired.

Andrea's family has a daily ritual that allows them to spend time together each day. That consistency is something she likes and needs in her life. Regardless of what may be going on or where they may be, they take time each night for dinner as a family. Even if she has to attend an event in the evening, they make it work. She explained:

We always try to eat dinner together. Always try to eat dinner together, no matter what. She tries to work her schedule around night appointments and

so on, so that five to seven time we're both free. So we at least have that 2 hours. If our days go crazy, no matter what, one of us is always there in the morning, but we are both always there for dinner. And we have been very cognizant of setting apart that time. Where we are, we're there. And you have to make those. You have to be very deliberate. You have to be very cognizant that you've got to try to stay firm with that, no matter what our schedules are. If something is later maybe I'm a half hour late for a contest or something, but I'm going to be here for dinner. And sometimes if there are games, we've had dinner here. They'll bring dinner and my partner will pick her up from school, and they'll go get dinner or something and we'll sit up here and eat together. And then go watch the game together.

Athletics directors in the study spoke of taking advantage of slower seasons, which can vary depending on the institution and the sports offered. For most, summer is a time when they can take more time to themselves, or spend more time with family and friends. Melanie tries to utilize summer time appropriately, as she can catch up with her daughters and work outside:

Sometimes my vacation time is just being home. In the summers, I don't do a lot of work on Fridays in the summers. It's pretty laid back and things, so I try to just be home in the summers. And then I can take the day, when the kids are around, to do house stuff. I love doing house things. I love doing my yard work and I love doing that so I'll try to take Fridays and do that sort of stuff.

The participants have varying tactics for prioritizing things in their lives. Since their schedules are busy, they do not have time for superfluous activities. Sometimes they can improve their well-being by eliminating, rather than adding something to their overflowing schedules. Annamaria spoke about choosing things wisely and removing those that hinder her in any way:

I kind of try to eliminate things that are not kind of life-giving things to me. If they are draining me, I can't afford that for a long time. That's not to say that don't get drained if there is a sickness or a tragedy in your family or some other kind of thing that you have to deal with, and you don't just walk away. But I think the choices that you make are to be around people that lift you up, versus bring you down. I think that's whether you're in a work setting or in a social setting or you're with your family.

Sometimes eliminating things from the participants' lives means they should say "No" from time to time. This can be challenging for participants, as they have become accustomed to attending nearly all home contests, accepting invitations for events, and serving on various campus committees. While their inclusion in these types of things is important, they may take precious time away from something, or someone, in need of their attention. Linda used event management as an example, as athletics directors could delegate another employee to oversee. She talked about women saying "Yes" too often:

I think that's the challenge that women—trying to balance—if they have a family, trying to balance that with professional. I think we need to learn how to just say "No I'm not going to be there tonight, or today, or whatever the event is." But I think it's also harder at Division III, because you don't always have the administrative staff to take care of that, because you have to have an administrator there.

These are just a few examples of things participants do to maintain as much work/life balance as possible. Since their lives are busy and their schedules do not have much wiggle room, it is important that they consider their needs, as well as the needs of their friends and family. They also spoke about the value in encouraging work/life balance to their coaches and staff members. The following section explores the ways they promote work/life balance and foster family-friendly environments for their respective athletics departments.

Promote and model balance

The data in this study made it clear that participants find it challenging to balance their personal lives. Their schedules are irregular, work days are long, and the work load is heavy, making it hard to find time and energy for family, friends, and other interests. While it is challenging to balance work and life, participants see the value for their overall health and well-being. As shown previously, the participants utilize various tactics in order to make

it all work. In addition to integrating their personal lives into their work, participants can promote balance with staff by fostering family-friendly environments and taking advantage of opportunities to escape work all together.

As they have learned how to manage work and life more appropriately throughout their careers, the participants discussed the importance of encouraging their coaches and staff to do so as well. Andrea spoke of the messages she sends to her athletics department personnel:

Balance, it's always a tough issue. What I tell my staff is, "Only you can balance it. Only you have control of whether you are balanced or not." Some people feel they have good work/life balance if they are working 60 hours a week, and that's fine. Others don't. They still have to do their job and they still have to put in their 40 hours, they still have to get things done. But how they do that and how they find balance, everybody has to find that out on their own.

The participants often try to mentor staff members in regards to work/life balance. Time and time again, athletics directors responded that they worked too much and too often put their personal lives on the backburner. While she is very competitive and has high expectations for her staff, Linda also desires for them to realize that there is more to life than work:

"I talk to them about it. We have two young coaches getting married this summer. I've really worked with them, trying to say "You've got to keep a balance. I am a perfect example of that. You have said things to me before so learn from it. Don't just get in a rut."

For those who are single, she advises them not to put their personal lives aside, as she did for much of her career, *"I have young coaches and so forth that are still single. I probably work on them, more than anything, about their personal life—keeping it intact, and not to overlook it."*

In addition to talking to employees about work/life balance, Linda strives to improve on this and model it well. Since her boyfriend passed away a few years ago, she works harder to balance her time. For most of her professional life, work was her priority, but she now realizes that life is too short to put all of her time and energy towards work:

I just try to point out mistakes that I make and they laugh at me at times. And they've seen me, the last four years, I just quit doing some things that I have done before. I'm just saying "I'm gone this weekend." Not as much as I should, or I should have done before, let's put it that way. So I give them the opportunity. I'll say "You go and do this and I'm going to do this weekend. You two need to get away. You go." And hopefully that helps them to realize that it was a good weekend to get away.

The participants have made it very clear that working in college athletics requires irregular hours, including many nights and weekends. Since their staffs work well beyond normal work days, participants typically do not demand rigidity in their staffs' daily schedules. While they expect the work will get done, there is some leeway as far as office hours go. Madison provided her philosophy on working typical hours:

I'm really kind of about—if you are good and you get your work done, I don't care how long you are here. But I do get frustrated if your work is not done or you're giving poor work, and you're not here. It's just a matter of getting really quality work done.

In addition to providing some flexibility in their schedules, Madison spoke of the providing regular encouragement. As a coach of 20 plus years, she realizes the extreme demands of their jobs. *"I try to do little things for people, like if they have been working extra hard at something, I try to give them a card or just do something to try to keep people engaged in what they are doing,"* she explained. Additionally, she stated that sometimes coaches just need permission and encouragement to take a break from their work. She strives to be in-tune with her coaches in this regard:

There are coaches that when I think they are working too much, I try to go have a conversation with them and say, “You need to get out of here. You need a vacation or you need to take the night off. I’m worried that you’ve been here too much.

Now that she has been in her position for a few years, Melanie spoke about desiring to do more of this mentoring with her staff. While she works hard to model work/life balance, sometimes it is necessary to have such conversations. She explained her desire to do more:

One of the things I need to do a better job at is being purposeful about discussing some of those things with my coaches. I haven’t done it in the past because they were all older than me and they were all in different life stages. As our staff has turned over, because we have had some turnover, I need to do a better job of being more purposeful of talking with people about balance and about being able to do all these things right. But hopefully I’m trying to model it as well.

When her daughter was born premature, Andrea’s institutional administration allowed her many liberties regarding leave time. For a span of several months, she was allowed to work much less than usual, as she tended to the needs of her partner and newborn daughter: *“Feeling that support from them and that they valued that family time was really incredible. That was extremely important for me and a real turning point for me.”* As a result, she strives to provide similar support and understanding for her employees when life happens: *“That has really given me the freedom to be able to balance more and be okay with it, and provide that same opportunity and make sure that is okay for the staff.”*

As much as they desire to win and breed success in their respective athletics departments, participants said it is important to realize that life gets in the way sometimes. It can be a struggle to keep this perspective, and ensure that their staffs do as well, but the

participants try to promote balance. Margaret talked about encouraging employees to see the bigger picture:

I try to make sure that people in this department know that their personal connections, and their moms and dads that are failing, and their brothers that are graduating, and their marriages and births are really kind of—that's what it's about, not whether you win a game or not. Because that's just today.

Family-friendly environment

In addition to modeling and promoting work/life balance, the participants try to foster family-friendly environments. While there are varying philosophies regarding this, the participants do realize it is important that family can be integrated into work.

Melanie realizes the challenges of balancing work and family firsthand, as she has three young daughters. On occasion she and her husband get in a bind and her daughters accompany her to work. While this is not something that occurs too often, they make it work. She models the importance of family, and extends the same liberties to her staff. She talked about bringing her daughters to work at times:

So you just kind of have to set up that it's a family-friendly environment. I may have my daughters with me, but I am still getting my work done. I talked with you yesterday that it's very important for me to let people know that I'm still able to do all the things that I need to do. It just happens to be that I have my kids here or something along those lines.

Andrea, who has a young daughter, sees the value in allowing staff to make their families part of their professional lives. As long as they do not get in the way or interfere with work, she promotes a family-friendly environment:

I think we have a really good environment, a positive environment for families. For coaches that want to be parents, to really integrate what we do here with their home lives. And that is the only way we can do what we do, effectively. Family becomes part of our work, and our work becomes part of family. If they want to keep that completely separate, this is not the

environment for them. Athletics is not a good environment if they want to keep one very separate from the other.

Andrea spoke of situations in which she has given employees opportunities to work from home or even bring their children to work on occasion. These tactics have helped build morale in her department and employees are productive with their time. She talked about her own experience of needing to bring her infant daughter to work at times, which then led others to feel comfortable doing so, too. She explained the circumstances as follows:

When my daughter was born, I had a pack-in-play in my office. And that pack-in-play has gone to several different offices, it's downstairs in the athletic training room now. It was in our men's and women's diving coach's office and now it has made its way down to the athletic training room for his daughter down there. That was a way for me to make it work and I think if you want to keep good people, you have to make it work for them too, whether they are male or female.

The participants feel it is necessary for foster family-friendly environments, partly so they can build relationships and trust with their staffs, as well as retain good coaches and people. If it is not possible to reach some level of work/life balance, valuable human resources may seek positions elsewhere. Margaret put this in perspective with other important aspects of her job:

As much as it is critically important for me to be present, as much as it's critically important for me to gain coaches trust, as much as it is critically important for me to gain student athletes trust, I think it is equally critically important for me to let my coaches live a life.

As Linda stated, she began to value work/life balance and the importance of family later in her career. Unfortunately, her boyfriend's death helped her to understand that life is too short to focus solely on work. While she desires for staff to maintain balance, she does not like it to interfere with their ability to do their work. She explained how her unfortunate circumstances have impacted the way she leads her organization:

So in that way maybe it has helped me to be a better administrator now, or more of an understanding administrator. I still don't want you to bring your kids to work every day. Once in awhile, when you get in a bind and you need to bring them to practice.

Margaret also responded that understanding family circumstances is something she values more now than earlier in her career. As a coach, she did not always understand the challenging balance people face:

It's something that I didn't come to until, I don't know, maybe five or six years ago myself. Because I don't have kids and I wasn't in a relationship, and so I often struggled with assistant coaches I had that I couldn't rely on necessarily, because their young children.

Sue spoke of the importance of making children and significant others feel welcome in the athletics environment. Without their support, coaches and staff members will not be happy and will not do their jobs as well. She understands the guilt coaches feel when they are away from home and their families, so she strives to maintain a supportive family environment. *"I think it's really critical and I just think it's a happier, healthier environment. Even if it didn't lead to any other kind of circumstance, it's just the fact that it's the right thing to do,"* she said.

Life outside of work

The participants were transparent about their levels of work/life balance. Some are more committed to this idea than others, but most fully admitted to having very little work/life balance. Lack of exercise was a common theme and while the participants have various interests, they often do not make time to enjoy them.

Those participants who find difficulty in maintaining work/life balance realize their behaviors need to change. They recognize it is not good for their health and well-being, yet

they continue down this path. With their busy and erratic schedules, it is easy to be consumed by their work. They are passionate about their jobs, but the work is plentiful so they have trouble squeezing everything in. Madison confessed to having trouble balancing her life and her work, although she realizes it needs to change. For example, running is something she enjoys, yet she does less than in years past. *“I’m in horrible shape right now because I’ve cut that right out. And that needs to come back into my life.”* She spoke of her desire to gain more balance and do things in which she takes pleasure:

I do have to figure out work/life balance, because it is going by really fast. Every year just flies by and it’s like all of a sudden, I need to do the things that I want to do. Of course everyone has a list of things they want to do, but it’s not like a bucket list. I’m not one of those people who has a bucket list, but just things I enjoy.

Sue also spoke of her necessity to gain more balance in her life, which she finds challenging because of her *“nature of being really committed to work.”* The all-consuming nature of her job has made it challenging to have leisure in her life. In thinking of her summer plans to take time off for a visit to her mother, she explained her challenging circumstances, *“Now I’ve got two searches in front of me, and I’m thinking, ‘I’m going to go to the end of June and I can’t possibly check out on these things.’ ”* In addition to taking time off for family, she mentioned a greater commitment to working out, eating better, and leisurely reading as things she desires to make time for:

That’s a work in progress and I do think it’s something that ultimately I have to get my arms around, because you tend to not workout like you should, you tend to not do the things that you should. And I know that is only a ticking time bomb.

Similarly, Melanie stated her great passion for her work, which she feels is always in the back of her mind. Other than spending time with her husband and daughters, she does

not often engage in leisure activities. She explained the emphasis she places on her career, but also stated that she chose for it to be this way. Her enthusiasm for her job is hard to ignore:

My job is my hobby, and it's constantly with me. It's constantly in the back of my mind. So I'm constantly thinking about it. Obsessed may or may not be the word, but it's probably close. So it is always there. I am 24/7 accessible. My cell phone number is blasted all across this campus so anybody can reach me at anytime. And so that's a good thing, that's a bad thing.

While Margaret and Annamaria indicated there are measures they could take to ensure better care of themselves, they seem to feel good about their balance and the choices they make. Margaret writes her initials on a “to do” list on the white board in her office, as a reminder to take care of herself. She discussed the measures she takes to achieve work/life balance:

I guess I try to eat right. I try to see my boyfriend as often as I can. I stay in touch with my family and I don't exercise as much as I know I should. I'm not doing a spectacular job of taking care of myself but my initials are up there and it reminds me. And every once in awhile I heed the advice.

Annamaria accepts it was her choice to work in this busy profession; therefore she does not spend much time thinking about how she desires to spend her free time:

I don't think as much about things I would prefer to be doing personally, because it was a choice I made about the schedule that I have. I feel good about working around it and taking advantage of the opportunity that I do have, to either get away or visit family or to take a vacation or whatever it is. I think I am low maintenance when it comes to having to travel the world and all that kind of stuff. I would love too, but it's not necessary to fulfill me at this point in my life.

For the first time in her career, Linda is taking more time to explore life outside of work. As mentioned previously, her unfortunate loss added perspective to her views on work/balance, which she no longer overlooks. She spends time at home, plays golf, travels

to visit family, goes on skiing trips, and just takes more time for herself. After a long career in which she often put her personal life on the backburner, she is enjoying more balance in her life.

Summary

The findings of the study were presented in this chapter. In order to give context to the findings, participant profiles were provided at the beginning of the chapter. This allows readers to gain greater understandings of the athletics directors' respective career paths and personal statuses. In presenting the study's findings, information was organized into the following three main themes:

The first section—*How Did They Get Here?*—described the participants' experiences prior to their attainment of athletics director positions. In this section, which provided important background information on the participants, their early interest in athletics, educational pursuits, career pathways, and professional relationships were explored.

The second section—*Why Do They Stay?*—delved into the participants' experiences specifically related to their positions as Division III athletics directors. Responsibilities of their positions, extended work hours, being *female* athletics directors, and zeal for Division III athletics, were major themes that emerged when discussing their roles as female athletics directors in NCAA Division III.

The third and final section—*The Balancing Act*—provided information related to participating athletics directors' work/life balance. This section explained the ways the participants' personal and professional lives have intertwined, how they balance people, strategies for making it all work, and their promotion of work/life balance.

Chapter 5 will provide a discussion and implications for the study. To tie the findings to the conceptual framework, the research questions are discussed, the relevant literature is revisited, and recommendations for future research are provided.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the professional, educational, and personal experiences of female athletics directors at selected NCAA Division III member institutions. As a whole, Division III has progressed more quickly than Division I and II as far as women serving in athletics director positions (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010). However, little previous research has delved specifically into the experiences of these women who serve as athletics directors within this competitive division. Division III is not only the largest division in terms of member institutions (NCAA, 2009, “Division III facts”), but is also unique to the NCAA membership because athletically related financial aid for student-athletes is not permissible (NCAA, 2007, “What’s the difference”).

Since Division III as a whole has provided more opportunities for women as athletics directors and the characteristics of this division are unique, it was determined that this study would provide valuable information to the body of knowledge related to women in intercollegiate athletics administration. The information will be valuable to college and university administrators, current athletics administrators, aspiring athletics administrators, current student-athletes, and non-athlete college students to gain a better understanding of the experiences of these individuals. Although this research focused on the experiences of women and was primarily geared towards female audiences, valuable information may also be provided to men in various roles.

The literature review included knowledge that helped frame the study, information specific to Division III athletics, the historical background of women in athletics

administration, women in intercollegiate athletics leadership positions, and women in the workforce. The career trajectory model (Spilerman, 1977) and work/family border theory (Clark, 2000) were utilized to frame the phenomena that were studied. Career trajectory was used to gain a better understanding of the participants' career paths. Work/family border theory helped explain how the participants' family and personal lives have impacted their professional experiences and vice versa.

Qualitative research design was applied to fully understand the lived professional, educational, and personal experiences of female athletics directors in NCAA Division III. More specifically, the study was guided methodologically by phenomenology, which served as the roadmap throughout the study and guided many facets of the research process. Phenomenology was an appropriate choice because the purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of the participants, as phenomenology seeks to focus the participants' lived experiences to a central meaning, or "essence" (Moustakas, 1994).

Seven women who currently serve as athletics directors at NCAA Division III institutions in the Midwest participated in the study. They were "purposefully selected" (Creswell, 2009, p. 179) to participate based on their experience within Division III athletics and the types of institutions in which they are employed. They are athletics directors at small, private, traditional residential institutions; this was vital to the study because the quintessential Division III experience exists on campuses such as these (NCAA, 2009, Division III). The participants took part in a series of three interviews that were semi-structured in nature. The first two interviews were face-to-face and took place on the athletics directors' respective campuses. The third, and final, interviews were conducted via telephone, occurring approximately one week following the face-to-face interviews. The

participants' résumés, job descriptions, organizational charts, and my researcher reflexive journal also provided valuable supplementary data for the study.

After the interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist, audio files were reviewed, while transcripts were evaluated line by line. The data were organized using QSR NVivo 8, a qualitative data analysis software program. Transcripts were analyzed using open and focused coding (Esterberg, 2002). It was through this data analysis process that the essence of the participants' lived experiences was understood. After analyzing, coding, and organizing the data, the information was arranged into three major themes of findings in chapter four.

The themes that emerged about the participants' experiences were organized into three sections in Chapter 4. The first section—*How Did They Get Here?*—described the participants' experiences leading up to their attainment of athletics director positions. Within this section, common themes emerged related to their early interest in sports, educational pursuits, career paths, and professional relationships. The second section—*Why Do They Stay?*—explored the participants' experiences specifically related to their positions as Division III athletics directors. Duties and responsibilities of their positions, long work hours, being *female* athletics directors, and passion for Division III athletics were major themes discussed in this section. When examining why the participants remained in Division III, they pointed to meaningful interactions with student-athletes and coaches, the well-rounded approach to athletics, and preparation of student-athletes for life after college as desirable characteristics that align well with their personal values. The third, and final section, of the findings—*The Balancing Act*—provided information related to athletics directors' work/life balance. This portion explained how the participants' personal and

professional lives have intertwined, how they balance those closest to them, strategies for making it all work, and their endorsements of work/life balance.

Chapter 5 is the final chapter of this dissertation. Within this chapter, the research questions presented in Chapter 1 are revisited by exploring the participants' experiences within the framework of relevant literature and theory. Implications for practice and recommendations for future research are also provided. My final, culminating thoughts as the researcher are included at the end of this chapter.

Findings

The following research question guided the study: What are the professional, educational, and personal experiences of women who serve as athletics directors at selected NCAA Division III member institutions? When seeking to answer this overarching question, the following sub-questions were utilized:

Research Question 1: What are the participants' career trajectories?

This question focused on the typical career paths that participating female athletics directors have taken. Spilerman's (1977) career trajectory model is a valuable tool in exploring participating athletics directors' respective career paths. This model aims to determine "a work history that is common to a portion of the labor force" and focuses on "a life-cycle phenomenon, typically a sequence of jobs" (Spilerman, 1977, p. 551) for a specific profession or position.

Spilerman's model has been used to examine career trajectories of NCAA intercollegiate athletics directors (Fitzgerald, 1990; Fitzgerald, Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin, 2004; Parrish, 2003; Sagaria, & Nelson, 1994) although the information has not been

specific to women in Division III. In the only study to consider differences in career trajectories for athletics directors in Division III, Fitzgerald, Sagaria, and Nelson (1994) revealed that career trajectories often differ between men and women, as well as among divisions. Although the normative career patterns specifically for women in Division III were not explored by Fitzgerald et al., it was established that female athletics directors in Division III were the least likely to follow the normative career patterns of Division I athletics directors.

When exploring the career trajectories of NCAA Division III female athletics directors in this study, commonalities existed among the participants. While their career paths were not indistinguishable, participants began working in intercollegiate athletics within a few years of graduating from college and had spent the majority of their professional lives coaching and administrating in intercollegiate athletics. Their normative career trajectories included typically holding positions of assistant and/or head coach and assistant or associate athletics director prior to becoming athletics directors. Although there were variations to their exact paths, the participants remarked that their coaching and early administrative experiences were valuable in their preparation to become athletics directors. Madison was the outlier of the group, as her only experience prior to becoming athletics director was as head volleyball and basketball coach. She did not hold an assistant or associate athletics director position prior to being named athletics director at her institution.

Although the previous literature related to women as athletics directors focused primarily on those in Division I and II, there are congruencies between the women in this study and those studied previously. In Selby (2001) and Teel (2005), career paths also varied among the participants, but coach, teacher, associate/assistant athletics director, and Senior

Woman Administrator were among the most typical responses. Considering this preceding literature, it appears that regardless of NCAA Division, coaching and administrative experience have been common steps for women progressing to athletics director positions.

As indicated previously, coaching and previous administrative positions were common positions held by participants as they progressed toward their roles of athletics directors. They spoke about their experiences as assistant or associate athletics directors as opportunities to gain responsibilities while also learning about the various facets involved with the management of intercollegiate athletics departments. Budget oversight, personnel and facility management, and event operations were among the valuable tasks completed during their previous administrative positions. In addition to the value in their experiences as assistant or associate athletics directors, they placed significant emphasis on their coaching backgrounds. Many were assistant coaches and all spent at least two years as head coaches. Most women coached multiple sports in their tenures; altogether, they coached basketball, volleyball, softball, indoor track, and swimming. While the sports they coached varied, they consistently pointed to these experiences as vital to their preparation and effectiveness as athletics directors.

Athletics directors supervise the coaches within their athletics departments; therefore, they feel it is imperative to relate to their coaching staffs. Their previous coaching experiences enable them to understand the pressures and situations their coaches often face, as they have “been in their shoes.” This is consistent with findings of female athletics directors in Division I (Grappendorf, 2001), in which participants pointed to the importance of their coaching experiences. Teel (2005) revealed that female athletics directors in Division I and II found their coaching experiences to be helpful, but less important in their

career advancement than other professional experiences. While it appears there have been some inconsistencies in the ways female athletics directors from the NCAA membership view their coaching experiences, the participants in this study highly valued them.

Regardless of their exact career paths, participating Division III athletics directors' career trajectories typically included meaningful coaching and administrating experiences prior to becoming athletics directors. While their career trajectories fluctuated somewhat, the participants have spent most of their professional lives gaining valuable knowledge and tools that assist them in their current positions.

Research Question 2: What factors have enabled these women to advance in NCAA Division III athletics administration?

The second research question sought information related to the career advancement of participating female athletics directors, specifically in regards to Division III. Since women have progressed to athletics director positions more frequently in Division III, it was important to explore circumstances within this division that may have enabled them to advance professionally. While the participating athletics directors could not address the circumstances of athletics directors in other divisions, they were able to speak regarding their own experiences in Division III. Since it is more common for women to secure athletics director positions in Division III, the participants indicated this scenario has become more accepted over time. According to Sue, *“if women are prepared and have the appropriate preparation, there will be opportunities for advancement in Division III.”*

The design of the study made it challenging to determine why the participants had advancement opportunities in Division III since they had only been athletics directors at this level. Obviously, the women were hired because of their credentials and leadership qualities;

nevertheless, factors such as their personal philosophies aligning well with Division III and aspects of their duties had also played important roles in their respective career advancements. While the participants did not specifically mention factors that may have enabled them to climb the administrative ladder in Division III, they did talk about facets of their work that align well with their personal philosophies of intercollegiate athletics. If their philosophies and skill sets did not align with those necessary in Division III intercollegiate athletics, they probably would not be where they are today. For example, one of Annamaria's strengths is her ability to serve as a sports administrator who advocates for coaches and student-athletes. This strength is also her passion. When combined, her ability and enthusiasm for administrative responsibilities enabled her to advance in Division III, where supervisory duties are typically assigned to athletics directors rather than assistants or associates.

While all participants have not spent their entire careers in Division III, it was clear this environment best suits the present professional desires of all seven women. The holistic approach to athletics, interactions with well-rounded student-athletes, and preparation of student-athletes for life after college, were all aspects of Division III athletics the participants cited when speaking of their passions for this level. Athletics directors frequently pointed to the attributes of Division III student-athletes, coaches, and the division's philosophy as important factors in their decisions to seek, and remain in, athletics administration positions in Division III. They spoke often about the Division III environment and their institutions providing the right "fit." If their views of intercollegiate athletics did not align well with those of the division and its student-athletes and coaches, it is likely that the participating athletics directors would not have ascended to their current positions.

When explaining their work responsibilities, participants spoke about the variety of tasks completed on a daily basis and that they must be able to handle many responsibilities on any given day. In leading their respective departments, it is important participants have the tools to oversee every aspect of athletics operations. When managing their departments, interpersonal communication was a frequently recurring theme. The participants often mentioned their interactions with student-athletes, coaches, and persons from various departments on their respective campuses. In addition to their daily contact with students and staff on their campuses, athletics directors also explained their frequent interactions with external constituencies such as alumni, staff members from other institutions, and outside vendors. It appears that relating well with others is an imperative trait for Division III athletics directors.

It is impossible to determine if the participants would have had the same opportunities to be athletics directors in other divisions. When reviewing previous literature related to athletics directors' duties in Division I and II, interactions with others is also vital. However, the types of interactions are likely different among athletics directors in the varying divisions, as the philosophies and purposes of Division I, II, and III differ. In Division I, it appears more emphasis is placed on external interactions, such as contacts with boosters, corporate partners, and entities to enhance their financial status, regardless whether the athletics director is male (Parrish, 2003) or female (Selby, 2001). This study revealed there is greater focus on interactions with student-athletes and campus personnel in Division III. The participants in this study intentionally sought positions in Division III because they perceived that, at this point in their professional careers, the environment best suited their values and beliefs as well as their skill sets.

Research Question 3: What circumstances have presented advantages for the participants?

This question focused on conditions that may have positively contributed to the participants' ascensions to athletics director positions. The question is important because the previous literature indicated that women face significant challenges when working in intercollegiate athletics administration (Dohrn, 2003; Grappendorf, 2001; Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; McDowell, 2008; Selby, 2001; Quarterman, DuPree, & Willis, 2006; Smith, 2005; Suggs, 2005; Teel, 2005; Wicker, 2008; Yates, 2007; Yee, 2007). Therefore, it was important that this study examine whether the participants had advantages working in this field.

An important finding in this study was that participating athletics directors love serving in their positions. They care deeply about college athletics, are energized by their interactions with student-athletes and coaches, see the value in the Division III philosophy, and desire to work hard for their respective student-athletes, coaches, staff, alumni, and institutions. Not only did they speak of this passion and exude it in their body language and facial expressions, but their zeal was also displayed when they frequently discussed their long and irregular work hours. They accept that their frenetic schedules come with the territory in athletics and are necessary in order to build successful programs. These women are very enthusiastic about the work they do, which seems to be an advantage in their professional careers. They have been willing to put the necessary time and energy into their careers in athletics, which has likely played a role in their ability to ascend to leadership positions.

While previous literature indicated that women often face barriers working in intercollegiate athletics because of their gender (Dohrn, 2003; Grappendorf, 2001;

Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; McDowell, 2008; Quarterman, DuPree, & Willis, 2006; Selby, 2001; Smith, 2005; Suggs, 2005; Teel, 2005; Wicker, 2008; Yee, 2007), a valuable finding in this study is that the participants have not faced such circumstances. They did mention a few instances that have occurred infrequently, in which sexist remarks have been made, but they have not faced situations that hindered their careers. Such comments have typically come from older men, often boosters, but the participants noted they overlooked these instances because they were uncommon. The participants do not perceive themselves as *female* athletics directors, but as athletics directors who constantly strive to do their jobs well. They have not faced barriers because of their gender and do not dwell on the few unflattering remarks that were made. The participants also stated that while the “good old boys” network has often been blamed for the struggles women have faced in athletics administration, they feel it has decreased throughout their careers. Participating athletics directors stated that remnants of this network or club still exist, but to a lesser extent than in the past and may be less prevalent in Division III.

The study also revealed that participating athletics directors have developed and utilized professional relationships to their advantage throughout their careers. When progressing through the ranks in college athletics, they relied on mentors for advice and guidance. As their careers continued and they gained more experience in the field, these professional relationships served more for networking purposes. Although there were similarities and differences in *who* served as their mentors, all of the participants gained valuable lessons from these persons, both men and women. When asked who their mentors were, the participants mentioned parents, coaches, supervisors, and colleagues within and outside of intercollegiate athletics. Regardless of who served in these roles at varying life

stages, the participants stressed the value of supportive and knowledgeable mentors.

Previous literature on female athletics directors in various NCAA divisions has also revealed that mentors were important to the participants' careers, and mentor positions were assumed by various people, both men and women (Lehoullier, 2007; Selby, 2001; Teel, 2005).

Even now that they have progressed to the highest levels of Division III athletics administration, the participants continue to rely on professional relationships for networking purposes. These relationships have been fostered and nurtured via NCAA committee work, attendance at conventions, and telephone and email contact. These relationships not only continue to provide athletics directors information and advice, but also provide prospective and friendships with others who understand their experiences. It is clear that the participating athletics directors have been intentional about utilizing mentors and colleagues throughout their careers, thus providing advantages to their professional advancement and development.

Research Question 4: What circumstances have presented challenges for the participants?

The fourth research question sought information related to the participants' struggles or barriers throughout their respective careers in intercollegiate athletics. As mentioned in Research Question 3, previous literature indicated that women face many challenges in the field of intercollegiate athletics administration. Most commonly noted as significant struggles in the professional development and advancement for women are: the lack of appropriate pathways (Dohrn, 2003; Suggs, 2005; Teel, 2005), the "good old boys" network (Grappendorf, 2001; Quarterman, DuPree, & Willis, 2006; Smith, 2005; Teel, 2005; Wicker, 2008; Yee, 2007), negative stereotypes of women (Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; McDowell,

2008; Selby, 2001; Smith, 2005), and time demands (Dohrn, 2003; Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Quarterman, DuPree, & Willis, 2006; Teel, 2005; Yates, 2007).

Taking the previous literature into consideration, while also realizing that very little research has focused specifically on women in Division III, this study sought to explore the challenges the participants may have experienced in their careers. As I considered the challenges participants have faced, it was vital to bracket my thoughts and assumptions to ensure my knowledge of the previous literature did not cloud my perspective. While participants responded they faced some challenges in their careers, there were no significant barriers as suggested in the literature. Of course, the participants have faced challenges in previous jobs, and continue to work through obstacles in their present positions, but it seems these occurred to a lesser extent than was indicated in the literature. This may be due to the fact that previous research focused primarily on women in Division I and II, or, in general, women now face fewer gender-related struggles than in years past.

As stated previously, studies about women in athletics administration have revealed that women often faced challenges rooted in their gender. Women are underrepresented in all three divisions of the NCAA membership (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010); the literature noted that this skewed representation and the culture of intercollegiate athletics have significantly impacted the experiences of women within the profession. When exploring such challenges for athletics directors in this study, the participants said they have experienced few of these negative situations. Participating athletics directors had equal opportunities for career advancement and were not victims of discriminatory practices. They did report that the “good old boys” network rears its ugly head at times, but possibly less often in Division III and probably to a lesser extent than in the past. Although the participants have been on the

receiving end of a few sexist comments in their careers, in general, they have rarely dealt with challenges related to their gender. Interestingly, several stated they have “been lucky” in respect to these experiences, suggesting they were aware of the literature or know of female colleagues who have encountered such circumstances.

While the participants’ circumstances related to gendered challenges differed from those found in previous studies, they said they faced similar challenges related to the profession’s time demands. In addition to evening and weekend hours associated with attending competitions, they had heavy workloads that required an abundance of time. According to the literature on women in the workforce, demands of professional responsibilities also exist outside athletics. Women in managerial and professional positions in other fields often face similar challenges associated with demanding work hours, too (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Athletics directors mentioned the complications involved in balancing their work and their personal lives; however, they accept that the irregular and extensive hours are part of the job. Even though the participants described the time demands as difficult, the challenge has not been great enough to explore options outside intercollegiate athletics. Andrea briefly considered a career move after reaching the point of burnout, but that was during her years as an athletics trainer. Since her transition to athletics administration, she has been satisfied with her ability to balance the long hours with her personal life. The time demands of the profession do challenge these women, but the data clearly reveal that the participants have great passion for their positions, student-athletes, coaches, and institutions. Although the lifestyle has its challenges, these athletics directors are content with their past and present

circumstances, and have found ways to make it work. Further exploration of participant's work/life balance is described in Research Question 6.

Research Question 5: What background experiences have impacted the participants' careers?

This research question delved into the participants' experiences prior to their careers in intercollegiate athletics. When looking at experiences that influenced the participants to pursue careers in intercollegiate athletics, their early involvement in athletics, participation as undergraduate student-athletes, and educational preparation were common elements.

Participating athletics directors were interested and involved in sports throughout their childhood and into adolescence and beyond. Typically their early interest in sports came as a result of familial influence, as siblings were often their playmates and parents encouraged them to participate. While the options for organized sports varied in their elementary school years, most began to have opportunities in junior high. They enjoyed participating and competing, which continued as they progressed to high school.

After successful careers at the high school level, all but one competed at the college level; Linda's undergraduate institution did not offer intercollegiate athletics for women at the time. The participants competed in volleyball, basketball, softball, tennis, and swimming, in various pre-NCAA and NCAA levels. They enjoyed their experiences as student-athletes, but at the time did not realize this involvement would impact their eventual careers. It was not surprising to learn of their athletics interests throughout their childhood and into their college years, as this was consistent with previous literature. Female intercollegiate athletics directors, regardless of NCAA division, have typically been highly involved in athletics from a young age. Participation in college athletics has been identified as a common step for

women in this profession (Grappendorf, 2001; Lehoullier, 2007; Selby, 2001; Teel, 2005); Division III athletics directors in this study followed suit.

Since intercollegiate athletics directors work within the context of higher education, it is important to realize their educational pursuits. The participants attended both small private institutions and larger public universities. While their programs of study varied, they earned baccalaureate degrees in areas related to physical education and human performance. Again, this is consistent with the literature on female athletics directors in Divisions I and II (Grappendorf, 2001; Selby, 2001; Teel, 2005). When selecting their colleges, athletics opportunities were often factors, but not frequently the driving force behind their decisions. For the most part, participants knew they desired to pursue careers in coaching, teaching, or something related to athletics. Their experiences as student-athletes and their foundation in physical education related studies prepared them well to enter the field of intercollegiate athletics.

In addition to pursuing baccalaureate degrees in areas related to physical education, the participants earned Master's degrees, also. Although their actual degrees varied (MA, MEd, and MS), their curricula were all related to sports. Four women continued beyond their Master's degree; one earned an MBA, one earned 30 hours beyond her Master's, one is working on an EdD, and one earned a certificate from the Sports Management Institute. The participants mentioned their graduate degrees as important steps in their careers, especially considering they work within higher education. Previous studies have revealed that Division I and II female athletics directors overwhelmingly earn graduate degrees (Grappendorf, 2001; Selby, 2001; Teel, 2005); the participants in this study also followed this precedent.

The findings of this study related to Research Question 5 were not surprising. For the most part, the participants' background experiences were congruent with previous research pertaining to female athletics directors in Division I and II. Although there are differences between administrators in the three NCAA divisions in general, there are many similarities in their background experiences related to their participation in sports, as athletes and coaches, and their educational pursuits.

Research Question 6: What have careers in intercollegiate athletics administration meant for the participants' respective personal lives?

This research question focused on participating athletics directors and their lives outside of athletics. The research question was posed because the literature clearly indicated that women in intercollegiate athletics have faced challenges associated with balancing their demanding professional lives with their personal lives (Dohrn, 2003; Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Quarterman, DuPree, & Willis, 2006; Teel, 2005; Yates, 2007). I was aware of this literature prior to the study; therefore, it was imperative to disregard this knowledge when approaching work/life balance with the participants. As this aspect can appear very different, for the purpose of this study, personal life included friends, family, or other persons or interests that could occupy their time away from work.

Several themes emerged related to the participants' work/life balance and the intertwining of their professional and personal lives. The participants' careers and personal experiences have coexisted throughout their professional lives, as they attempt to balance the people who make up their personal relationships. Partners, long-term boyfriends, husbands, children, and friends play valuable roles for the participants. A key finding was that a variety of people played vital roles in the participants' personal lives. Three women have female

partners, one has a long-term boyfriend, one is married, and two are single. Of those who have partners, two participants have one child each. The woman who is married has three young children. The participants also have parents, siblings, nieces, nephews, and friends who play key roles in their personal lives.

Regardless of the major players in their lives, the participants stressed that these people must appreciate the unique time demands of the profession. Without such understanding individuals, these women felt they would not be able to make it work. The participating athletics directors utilized various tactics for maintaining these relationships, but, generally speaking, they simply do whatever it takes to make it work by prioritizing their lives. Although the balance is a constant struggle, the participants indicated it is imperative to combine work and life when possible, as well as promote work/life balance for others in their respective athletics departments.

Although the participants strive to employ work/life balance, they admitted it is very difficult. This challenge is not new to women, both in and out of intercollegiate athletics. Women in the workforce experience similar feelings; they commonly feel the strain between work and home (Hesse-Biber, 2005). As they struggle to maintain both domains, unfortunately, some women end up sacrificing one for the other. In fact, as women climb the corporate ladder, they are less likely to have a spouse or partner and children (Powell & Graves, 2003). The participants' challenges with this balance are heightened because of the extended and irregular hours their jobs require. Their responsibilities are numerous, and their work schedules are irregular and extreme; it is very hard to find ample time and energy for family, friends, and other pursuits. These struggles also exist for female managers in other

fields who face comparable challenges because of the similarly long work hours associated with leadership and professional positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Work/family border theory (Clark, 2000) is useful when exploring the participants' personal and professional experiences. According to this theory, "people are daily border-crossers between the domains of work and family" (p. 747) and though "people shape their environments, they are, in turn, shaped by them" (p. 748). Clark argued that there is a division between a person's workplace and home, with each often having its own purpose, culture, language, and behaviors. Working professionals constantly manage their professional and personal roles, and the borders between them, in attempting to adequately balance both spheres. For some, the transition between the two domains is smooth; for others the contrasting environments present challenging transitions.

When viewing the participants' experiences in light of work/family border theory, it is clear that female athletics directors in NCAA Division III are daily border-crossers. This is especially true considering the emphasis participants placed on the ways their personal and professional lives have, and continue to, intertwine frequently. In fact, tactics participants utilize, and encourage others to implement as well, are the notions of combining work and life, and fostering family-friendly environments. It is common for participant's spouses, partners, and children to attend athletics events. In addition, to varying degrees, athletics directors strive to ensure staff members' children and significant others feel comfortable in their respective athletics environments. This theory applies well to the study's participants, as their professional and personal spheres often collide. Some participants navigate the balance between these domains better than others, but one cannot argue that their work and family systems converge regularly.

These findings are valuable information to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding women in intercollegiate athletics administration. The literature clearly indicates that time demands of the intercollegiate athletics administration present challenges for women and their family and personal relationships; however, previous work focused primarily on those in Division I and II and did not delve into their work/life balance. This study revealed that female athletics directors in Division III face similar challenges, and it also explored their circumstances on a deeper level.

Implications

The study's findings have implications for various constituencies, including aspiring and current intercollegiate athletics administrators, coaches, and institution administrators. By exploring the experiences of women who serve as Division III athletics directors, this work provides information for persons considering careers in athletics, those currently working in the field, and administrators who manage colleges and universities.

Aspiring intercollegiate athletics administrators, such as current student-athletes and young professionals in athletics, can utilize the study's findings when making important career decisions. The data revealed that the participants obtained graduate degrees and gained many years of meaningful experience in athletics, both as coaches and lower-ranking administrators, which may be beneficial career preparation information for those with administrative aspirations. The participants' previous coaching positions may be of special interest to these individuals, since participating athletics directors stressed the significance of these experiences in their current positions. Information about the participants' professional relationships should also be valuable to aspiring athletics administrators. As current student-

athletes and young professionals progress in their respective careers, mentoring and networking relationships will likely play important roles; therefore, they should consider such relationships while moving forward in their careers.

This study informs aspiring and current athletics administrators who may have little knowledge of Division III athletics and its philosophies and purpose. By providing information about individuals who lead Division III athletics departments, this study may enlighten and encourage others to pursue opportunities at this level. If their skill sets and personal philosophies align well with those in NCAA Division III, aspiring and current athletics administrators could widen their scope of potential employment opportunities. Since Division III has the largest membership within the NCAA, future professional opportunities for these populations might exist within this division.

Current intercollegiate athletics administrators, both men and women in all divisions, can utilize the study's findings to inform their careers going forward. As stated previously, those with limited experience in, and knowledge of, Division III may become interested in future opportunities at this level when learning more about the study's participants. The participating athletics directors clearly love serving in their current positions because their values fit well with the philosophies and purpose of Division III athletics. Interactions with coaches and student-athletes, the holistic approach to intercollegiate athletics, and the preparation of student-athletes for life after college were common emerging themes related to their passion for the Division III environment. This study may encourage current athletics administrators with similar philosophies and values to explore opportunities in Division III. These findings also provide valuable information about the tasks and responsibilities of Division III athletics directors and their essential skill sets. Since administrators in Division

III have not been studied extensively, there may be misconceptions about what these positions actually entail.

This study also provides implications for current female athletics administrators because it examines work/life balance and potential gender challenges in Division III. Participating athletics directors' personal lives vary; they are married, partnered, and single. Some have children while others do not. These findings will enable women in the field to note there are unique personal qualities of women who serve as Division III athletics directors; one size does not fit all. As the literature has revealed, women in all divisions face work/life balance challenges when working in intercollegiate athletics. This study's findings parallel those in previous research; however, this work delved deeper into these challenges to explore how the participants' personal and professional lives converge. This information can be valuable to women in athletics administration with various personal circumstances. The study also provides pertinent information to women currently serving in athletics administration because as the participants reported very few challenging instances related to their gender. Some even suggested that sexist behavior and the "good old boys" club may exist to a lesser extent in Division III. This may be valuable information for women in intercollegiate athletics, particularly if they have faced gender barriers in their careers.

College coaches may find this information useful, particularly those considering transitions to intercollegiate athletics administration. Participating Division III athletics directors stressed the importance of their coaching experiences; therefore, this study should inform current coaches when preparing for potential career moves. It would likely be important for them to gain experience as lower-ranking administrators as well, as coaches may realize they have some necessary attributes to eventually become Division III athletics

directors. The participants discussed the importance of motivating and interacting well with others, managing personnel, and juggling several tasks; coaches may also carry out such tasks when coaching their respective teams. If they are interested in eventually pursuing athletics director positions, coaches may also utilize the study's information and develop professional relationships with others in intercollegiate athletics. The participants in this study revealed the value of mentoring and networking relationships, which came from various sources; therefore, coaches with administrative aspirations should be mindful of such interactions and opportunities regarding their future.

Institution administrators at Division III colleges and universities can utilize the information related to participant's strenuous schedules and lack of work/life balance to improve athletics directors' satisfaction. While the participants in this study were clearly passionate about their jobs and reported being content in their current positions, there are likely some athletics directors who experience burnout because of their demanding schedules. Athletics directors reported working long and irregular hours, making it challenging to have meaningful personal lives. Institution administrators could use this information to inform future athletics department staffing decisions. The addition of athletics department personnel may allow athletics directors to find more time for family, friends, and other interests. The addition of even one administrator per institution could lessen athletics directors' game management duties and also lighten their workloads, in general. Because adding staff to athletics departments is largely dependent on institutions' respective financial situations, this may be challenging for Division III institutions to consider.

While it may be financially difficult to increase their athletics department staffs, institution administrators could use the study's information to encourage flexible daily

schedules and family-friendly environments. This would be a more budget-friendly approach to improving athletics directors' work/life balance. The participants often mentioned the support received from their supervisors regarding flexible work schedules and the freedom to integrate family into their jobs. Since competitions require athletics administrators to work evenings and weekends, it would be valuable for them to have greater flexibility in their workdays. Athletics directors will likely continue to work long and irregular hours because of the unique demands of the job; therefore, institution administrators could lessen their stress levels, allow more work/life balance, and increase satisfaction levels, by utilizing the information provided in this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

While considering the valuable information gleaned from this study, there are several opportunities for future research to continue exploring female and male athletics directors in Division III, athletics directors across the NCAA membership, and work/life balance in the broader field of intercollegiate athletics.

This study was the first to specially examine the experiences of athletics directors in NCAA Division III—female or male. Although a wealth of information pertaining to the participants' educational, professional, and personal experiences was gleaned from this work, there are opportunities for future research. This study focused on women who are athletics directors in a small region in the Midwest; therefore, it would be valuable to conduct a study of women in similar positions in all regions of the country. There may be differences in the experiences of women depending on institutions' geographic locations. A quantitative study of all women in these positions could provide valuable information about the broader

population of female athletics directors in Division III. In addition, future research could explore the experiences of men who serve as Division III athletics directors as they do hold the majority of athletics director positions in this division.

Since little research exists on athletics administrators in NCAA Division III, little is known about their experiences. Future research could examine athletics administrators' experiences and consider factors such as public and private institutions, men's, women's, and co-educational colleges, geographic regions, and enrollment. Division III has the largest membership within the NCAA and its philosophies are unique; therefore, information about administrators at these institutions would be valuable to the current body of knowledge.

As there are many differences among the three NCAA divisions, it would be valuable to compare the experiences of athletics directors within the entire membership. Previous literature has examined each division separately. Although assumptions can be made, a comparative work would provide concrete information about the similarities and differences of athletics director positions in Division I, II, and III. The philosophies and goals of these divisions are diverse, and it would be interesting to explore how these differences impact athletics directors.

Finally, continued study of work/life balance in intercollegiate athletics would be valuable. The findings of this study revealed that participants struggle to balance their personal and professional lives. While previous literature has also revealed that women in intercollegiate athletics administration face challenges when handling their extreme work demands, their experiences have not been studied in greater detail. Future research could continue not only to study women in athletics administration, but also examine the experiences of coaches and other departmental staff—both men and women. Work/life

balance has clearly presented challenges for those working in intercollegiate athletics, and it would be valuable to dig deeper to determine if new understandings can be uncovered to develop new and better ways to improve work/life balance.

Final Thoughts

Conducting this research and exploring the experiences of female NCAA Division III athletics directors has been demanding, exhilarating, and humbling. This process, which lasted approximately one year, stretched me tremendously and brought a wealth of emotions. There were small obstacles and numerous victories. This academic exercise enabled me to explore a topic of great personal interest, while it also provided valuable information to the professional field of intercollegiate athletics administration. There are thousands of students who compete nationwide as NCAA student-athletes each year, and their experiences are largely impacted by those who lead athletics departments. By gaining better understandings of the women who serve in these roles, specifically in Division III, we can appreciate the work they do and strive to improve our practices in NCAA intercollegiate athletics. It is hoped that ongoing research on intercollegiate athletics administrators will continue to have a positive impact on the experiences of student-athletes for years to come.

The seven women who participated in this study are passionate about the student-athletes and coaches they serve, they value the lessons learned in the athletics arena, trust the philosophy of Division III athletics, and believe in the mission of their respective institutions. If these women are representative of the greater population of this division's athletics directors, NCAA Division III athletics are in very good hands.

Participating athletics directors had important stories to tell and it was my pleasure to bring their experiences to light. I am indebted to Andrea, Annamaria, Linda, Margaret, Melanie, Madison, and Sue; they gave me their time and their full attention, while also offering support and enthusiasm throughout the process. They provided so much to me, but they also valued the research process and the opportunity to partake. Several remarked that they enjoyed the chance to think deeply and reflect on their experiences, which is something they rarely do in the midst of their frenetic schedules. While participants have completed survey research in previous studies, none had taken part in an in-depth study such as this. They could have been apprehensive about the process or the time involved, but all were extremely generous with their time, candidness, and genuine interest in the study and its findings. Although it may be cliché, I could not have done this without them.

As a former Division III student-athlete and assistant coach, aspiring administrator, and a woman, this is a topic of great interest to me. I was fortunate to have wonderful experiences while competing at the Division III level and, although I am currently employed in Division I athletics, I often consider transitioning back to Division III. Not only was this study important because of the gaps in the previous literature, but also it was clearly of great personal interest to me. Because of my genuine passion for Division III athletics and my desire to continue working in this exhilarating profession, this strenuous research process was also a pleasure to undertake. I greatly enjoyed meeting the participating athletics directors and learning about their experiences, and I desired to represent them as accurately as possible. I am pleased with the results of this research, and look forward to seeing how this information can be valuable for current athletics administrators, aspiring athletics administrators, and college and university administrators in the future.

APPENDIX A. RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear (insert name),

My name is Molly Parrott, I am a 3rd year doctoral student in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies at Iowa State University. I have completed my coursework and am in the process of planning my dissertation study, entitled “How did they get here, and why do they stay? A phenomenological study of female athletics directors at selected NCAA Division III member institutions.”

For this study, I will conduct qualitative analysis on women who serve as athletics directors at NCAA Division III institutions. I am interested in the professional, educational, and personal experiences of women in these positions. Little research has examined female athletics directors specifically in Division III, even though there are more women in these positions than in Divisions I and II. Further, the research aimed at women in Divisions I and II has found them to face challenges in balancing their professional and personal lives, however little research has delved into those experiences.

In collecting data for the project, I will interview women who currently serve as athletics directors in NCAA Division III. Since you currently serve as the athletics director at (insert institution), I am interested in you participating in the study. Your participation would last three days, as I desire to conduct three interviews, each lasting approximately 90 minutes. Ideally, I would like to conduct two in-person interviews on your campus and one additional phone interview approximately one week after my visit.

As a former NCAA Division III student-athlete at Central College (Iowa) and an aspiring athletics administrator, this is a topic very near and dear to me. I would greatly appreciate your participation in this study. While participating will require a bit more time than a survey or basic interview, I am confident that this research will provide valuable information for current athletics administrators, college and university administrators, aspiring athletics administrators, and current female student-athletes.

Please know that your participation in my study is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any point. Further, if any questions make you uncomfortable or you wish not to answer, that is OK too.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me at mparrott@iastate.edu or 515-520-7316. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Molly Parrott

APPENDIX B. INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: How did they get here, and why do they stay? A phenomenological study of female athletics directors at selected NCAA Division III member institutions.

Investigator: Molly Parrott

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to understand the personal, educational, and professional experiences of women who currently serve as NCAA Division III athletics directors. You are being invited to participate in this study because of your position as an athletics director at an NCAA Division III member institution.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for three days, which will consist of three 90 minute interviews. The first and second interviews will take place in-person, while the third will be conducted via telephone approximately one week later. During the study you may expect the following study procedures to be followed: You will be asked to take part in a series of three semi-structured interviews, and answer questions regarding your personal, educational, and professional experiences related to your career in intercollegiate athletics administration. You may skip any question that you do not wish to answer or that makes you feel uncomfortable. The interviews will be audio recorded and then transcribed by a professional transcriptionist, with tapes to be erased immediately following the transcription. A pseudonym will be attached to the data prior to sending it to the transcriptionist, so the researcher is the only person who will know your identity.

RISKS

There are minimal foreseeable risks at this time from participating in this study. Information of a personal nature may be sought by the researcher, but you may opt out of questions at any time.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there may be no direct benefit to you, although it is hoped that the information will be useful to you and others in intercollegiate athletics administration.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: The researcher is the only person who will know the identities of the participants. A professional transcriptionist will transcribe the audio files; however, the identity of participants will be replaced by pseudonyms so the transcriptionist will not know the identities of the participants. After the interviews have been transcribed and sent back to the researcher, the interviews will be deleted from the recorder and the transcriptionist will delete all files. Throughout the study, data will be kept on password protected computers, in the locked homes of the researcher and transcriptionist. All potential identifiers will be removed in the final written report. In the data analysis process, the findings (for your data only) will be sent to you via email. If you feel that potential identifiers are present, they will be deleted. All data will be deleted or destroyed when the project is complete in December 2010. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

For further information about the study contact investigator Molly Parrott (515-520-7316) or Dr. Barbara Licklider (515-294-1276).

If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator (515-294-4566), IRB@iastate.edu, or Director (515-294-3115), Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed) _____

(Participant's Signature)

(Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

(Signature of Person Obtaining
Informed Consent)

(Date)

APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

A series of three semi-structured interviews will be used to gather data from each participant. The following questions will guide the interview sessions, although I will interject with follow-up questions depending on the flow of the conversations.

Interview one – Focused life history

- Tell me about your childhood as it relates to athletics.
- Tell me about your educational background, including your athletics experiences.
- Take me down your career path in college athletics.
- In your previous positions in athletics, what have been your responsibilities?
- How did you end up in Division III?
- Why do you work in athletics, and specially Division III?
- What professional mentoring relationships you've had?
- What personal relationships have you had throughout your career in athletics?
- How have these personal relationships influenced your career path?

Interview two – Details of experiences

- How has your educational background prepared you for your career?
- How did your previous positions prepare you for this position?
- If I were to follow you on the job for a day, what would I see?
- What is the climate like for women in this profession?
- How have male colleagues reacted to your leadership?
- What is your impression of the challenges women may face in this field?
- How does your role as athletics director your personal life?
- How does your personal life impact your role as athletics director?
- How do you balance your professional and personal lives?
- How does the Division III environment affect your work/life balance?

Interview three – Reflection on the meaning

- What do you think it means to be a female athletics director?
- How do you network with other female athletics directors?
- Why are there so many female athletics directors in Division III?
- How would your role differ at Division I or II?
- What advice would you give young women in the profession?
- What are the rewards of being in your position?
- What are the drawbacks of being in your position?
- Where do you see yourself going from here?
- What meaning do you make of the various roles you play?
- Considering our discussion, why do you do what you do?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experiences?

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